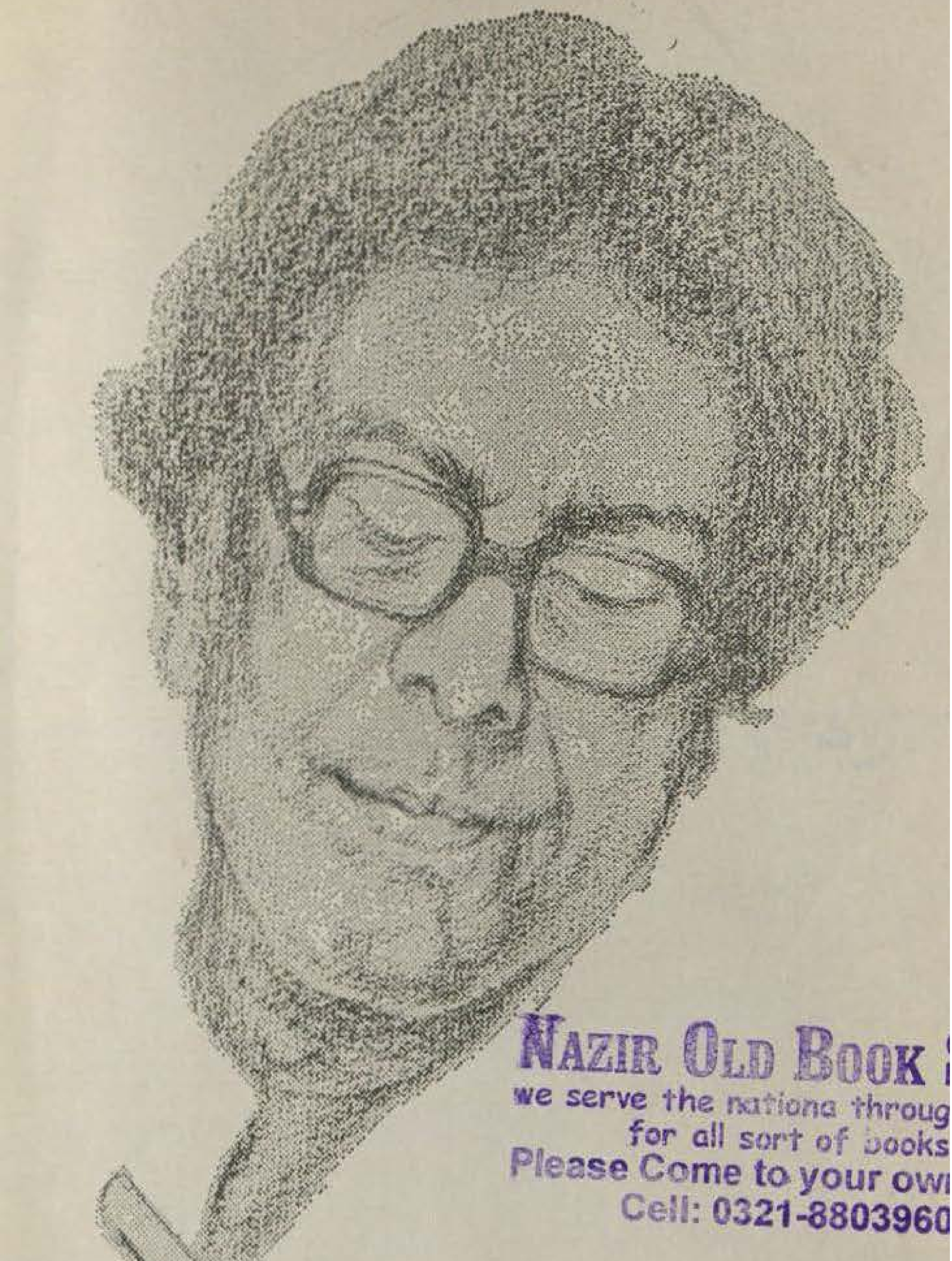
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Selections from INDIAN LITERATURE

SAHITYA ACADEMY



SAMARESH BASU : A FEATURE

The Whirlpool

SAMARESH BASU

No, no and no !

Badshah, tired and exhausted, had asked just three questions as he held on to his hookah. And Zubeda had answered "no" every time.

Having trudged eight miles, he had felt the dire need to soothe his parched throat before washing his hands and feet. He had climbed up the steps straightaway, the dust of the road clinging to his feet and had grabbed the hookah before thumping down on the verandah. He had fumbled and fingered the empty tobacco container and finally asked "Isn't there any tobacco?"

"No" replied Zubeda, sounding like a culprit.

"No leaves either?"

"No."

"Any treacle, then?"

"No."

"No again!" The word, encircling his tired brain, seemed to burst forth into a million fragments in a sudden, intense fit of wrath. His entire being seemed ablaze with flames of anger. He dashed the hookah savagely on the floor, breaking it into pieces. The yellowish water within trickled across the floor into the courtyard below. "No" he yelled fiercely to himself, "Always no!" Then he swept into the room, hitting everything

in a mad rage. He threw pots, pans and whatever he could find on the floor, shattering them all to bits, like a ravaging lunatic. He slapped and kicked himself and then, all of a sudden, he turned around and kicked Zubeda fiercely in the ribs. "What are you staring at, you wench of a swine?" he cried, "What the devil are you staring at? Get out! Get out of my sight!"

Zubeda had been trembling in terror ever since she saw Badshah in a raging fury. His sudden kick made her lose her balance. She crashed across the floor, her head knocking against the wooden frame of the door.

Just then Badshah's son Mangal ran into the house, having finished playing. He stood petrified at the sight which met his eyes. It seemed for a moment that Badshah would attack him next. But he didn't. He stormed out of the house instead. Seeing him go, a fresh terror seized Zubeda. "Mangal" she shrieked with a sob, "Run after him, dear. See where he is going. I only hope he doesn't kill himself!"

As a matter of fact the thought of killing himself had not crossed Badshah's mind. He strode across the empty mosque going right behind, where the ancient *hijal* tree stood spreading out its knotted roots and threw himself upon them. "Oh God!" he cried, breaking down completely. "Oh God !"

Badshah had not got into such a mad rage simply because there was no tobacco. The reason was that he had been rendered a pauper all of a sudden. The acre and a half of sloping land by the river which had brimmed his heart with hope and eager anticipation all these years, had been wrenched away from him a little while before. Since then a gaping emptiness was staring him hard into the face.

A few years ago, no one had imagined that he would be able to grow crops from this craggy piece of land. It was no easy task to plough this uneven slope. Bulls were bulls, after all. One could not use them like machines, and force them to trudge

up the slopes. But Badshah had remained totally undaunted. Ever since he was cured of a terrible fever four years ago by the holy medallion acquired from the great Hazrat Pir Khali Kujjman, he had kept excellent health. Each morning he would religiously drink the water in which the medallion had been dipped and virtually throw himself on that rocky sloping bit of land, girding up his loins in a wild determination to fructify it. He would convert this God-forsaken piece of earth into a beautiful paradise, he said to himself. This strip of wasteland would then put the plains to shame!

He had faithfully adhered to his word, but his elder brother Suleman had not shared either his faith or optimism. He could not really hope that the slope would ever yield fruit. So he had left the place in desperation and made his way to the city to work as a mill-labourer. He was afraid of starving in the village. The bleak, weedy, sloping wasteland had dried all his hopes. He had also taken his wife along with him.

But Badshah had refused to go. He was a farmer to the core. He was proud of his independence and hated to slog for others. He considered working in a factory degrading. Insulting! The same piece of land which had prompted the cowardly Suleman to run away inspired Badshah to toil with his blood and reap a golden harvest.

Badshah had later implored Suleman to visit the village and witness the miracle he had brought about : and Suleman had responded to his invitation. He was truly amazed at what he saw. His heart was filled with a deep respect and pride for his younger brother. He felt ashamed of himself, of his own weakness in not having had the guts to take up the challenge the way his brother had done! It seemed to him as though he was the younger brother—and not Badshah!

But Suleman had not been particularly unhappy in the city. He had already earned quite a bit of money and had enough to lead a comfortable life. Badshah was somewhat amazed to see him dressing up and speaking like a 'gentleman'. But his amazement was not prompted by respect. Only a rustic wonder

at its being so. That wonder had brought about a mocking smile to his lips. So his brother was proud of his slavery!

Badshah of course had borrowed some money from Mahmud to buy a pair of oxen to plough his land. He had to borrow some more for buying seed too. He had absolutely no idea what his debts added up to. He realized it only this morning when Mahmud sent for him and said that his sloping piece of land by the riverside now belonged to him—unless Badshah paid up the entire amount immediately. The debt had multiplied too fast and grown too heavy. He would have to give up not only his land but also his home to square it up. He would lose all that he had owned to this day. The thought panicked him.

Badshah had rushed to the house of farmer Mohin Thakur. He wanted to offer him partnership in his field to escape this ruin. He could have made the offer to Mahmud as well but he hadn't. He was still too angry with Mahmud. Besides, Mahmud had given him no chance to make the offer. On the contrary he had curtly said : "Look here, Badshah, you'd better not try to get inside my property any more. Your debt is too big to be repaid by just that bit of land. You'd better bring your oxen as well and leave them with me. I'll write down how much they are worth and you'll put your thumb impression on the document. By the end of this year your entire ancestral property is going to belong to me."

Mahmud had paused sizing up Badshah for a while, and said, "I'll put up my labourers in your ancestral home. If you like, you can also stay with them. You and your son. Then you won't have to leave your home." In short, Badshah was offered the job of a labourer, working for Mahmud.

"Well, I'll think it over," Badshah had told him and gone straight to the village market to look up Mohin Thakur. But Mohin Thakur was tactfully reticent; and when he spoke out he was non-committal. He neither agreed to the partnership proposal nor gave any reason for not agreeing. He merely mouthed a great deal of advice : "Go to Mahmud, he might

agree to go halves with you. After all, he belongs to your caste and happens to be a wealthy man. You go to him."

Since then Badshah had been feeling a deep, gnawing emptiness within his heart. It seemed to him that he was getting trapped in a dark tunnel which had no end. Now he owned nothing in the world. Absolutely nothing! Zubeda's three negatives seemed to compound this nothingness into a stunning blow : and his dumb, directionless wrath burst forth savagely !

Badshah slowly raised his face and gazed at the distant horizon. The twilight was wrapped in silence. Hardly any sound came from the fields or roads around. It was time to sow the late autumn crops, but not a single man was to be seen anywhere. Virtually all the small land-owners subsisted under the thumb of Mahmud. Unless he gave the command and also the necessary seed, no one could start work.

One could see only bleak, empty fields right upto the horizon. The dried-up stubs of the last crop stuck out of the fields like needles pointing to the sky. Reeds had grown here and there surrounded by wild grass stretching out far and wide. And clusters of tall white catkins on long, slender stems bloomed at various places swaying in the breeze. It seemed to Badshah that they were like a group of women in white burkhas, like his own Zubeda, walking across the empty field, nodding their heads, crying out "there's nothing, there's nothing." Did Mahmud himself ever look at these swaying reeds and the blooming catkins? he wondered.

Suddenly Badshah was startled to see a head behind the enormous antheap in front of him. The dust was getting denser. A shiver ran across his spine. "Who's there?" he cried standing up. The scared and guilty-looking face of Mangal peeped from behind the antheap.

"Who is it? Mangal?"

"Yes."

Badshah's heart turned right over at the sight of his young son's anxious and terrified face. An inexplicable pain and repetence gnawed within his chest. His entire soul longed to burst into tears as he remembered how badly he had behaved a little while ago. He had probably broken the ribs of his wife, the mother of his only child. And broken the heart of his young son. He was no longer Mangal's "Baapjaan" (dear father). It seemed as though a frightened lamb stood before a strong and hefty hound. "Come here Mangal", his voice seemed to burst into tears.

Mangal stepped forward like an uncertain chick, scared and hesitant. Badshah drew him into his arms and in an attempt to make light conversation, said "Your shirt is very cute. Who has given it, my boy?" Mangal cheered up at his father's words and short memory. "Aunt had sent it to me for Eid last year, don't you remember?"

Badshah then remembered his sister-in-law. His elder brother Suleman's wife, who had turned downright brazen since going to the city. She hardly ever wore the burkha these days. Nor did she cover her head like the farmer women did. Nor did she feel embarrassed to speak to men other than her husband. Really his 'Bhabi Saheba' had turned utterly shameless. And she had brought shame on the entire family. She spoke fast and swayed when speaking. She had almost become a stranger to Badshah. Badshah could no longer fathom her—or her strange, unfamiliar ways. He remembered the words of the Kazi who had warned everyone about women who "showed their teeth while laughing and made a noise while walking."

And almost at once he thought of Zubeda. The shy and timid Zubeda who had seen no sunlight other than the stray beams which stole into the courtyard. Who viewed the world through the little hole in their hedge.

But though shameless, his sister-in-law had an affectionate nature. She was a large-hearted woman. She loved Badshah and Zubeda like her own brother and sister. There was not

a spot of jealousy in her. And as for Mangal, not having any children of her own, she thought of Mangal as her own son. She sent him whatever she could lay her hands upon—all through the year! Food, snacks, clothes, caps and even shoes. Whenever Mangal fell ill, she fasted for him. And Suleman's letters arrived in close succession, informing him that Mangal's aunt was neither eating nor drinking water until he should get well.

At this moment it did not seem as though his brother Suleman's life was a particularly bad one. At least there was no chance of his turning into a pauper overnight! He remembered that enormous chimney which almost touched the sky, spurting smoke continuously. Black, solid smoke! His brother worked in the big hall just below. He brought money regularly every week, and gave it all to his wife. There were no wants, no problems in their tiny home. Earn and eat, eat and earn!

Mangal interrupted his stream of thoughts. "Come home, Father. Mother has been crying ever since you left." "Yes, let's go," said Badshah with a sigh. As they walked along, he suddenly asked, "Do you want to go to your Aunt, Mangal?"

Mangal was astonished. He knew from various remarks and incidents that his father hated his brother and sister-in-law. So he felt too scared to give a delighted answer in the affirmative. He just stared at his father's thoughtful face in the dark.

The house stood silent. Badshah pushed open the gate and sat on the varandah. Mangal went to his mother. Badshah saw no trace of the things he had thrown about, breaking them to bits. Everything was neat and clean as usual. He sat in the darkness with a penitent heart. After a while Mangal came and gave him a hookah—filled with fresh tobacco leaves from which a fragrant smoke ensued—and he heard the tinkle of glass bangles behind the door. Pained and ashamed, Badshah took the hookah from his son. He puffed at it absent-

mindedly for a few moments and said—"Mangal's mother, are you there?"

"Yes," came the soft reply from behind the door.

"Come here for a moment."

Zubeda came and stood at the corner of the dark corridor, a little away from him. The bangles in her wrist gleamed in the dark. But Badshah did not look at them or at her. "Mahmud did not spare my land beside the river," he said quietly.

For the first time in his life Badshah mentioned a family problem to his wife. It had always been his firm conviction that all problems were meant for menfolk alone. Women were just meant to cook, bear children and look after the husband and other family members This is what he had thought all along. But now he added—"Seeing no other way, I had been to Mohin Thakur. But he is not willing to go halves with me."

Zubeda stood silent. She did not know what to reply. Out in the open fireflies glowed in the dark. Badshah lifted his face and looked at Zubeda, "We shan't be able to stay in this house much longer, Mangal's mother. Do you understand?" He smoked in silence for a while and suddenly said—"Well, Bhabi saheba is rather shameless to be sure, but she loves us very much. She doesn't miss a single festival and always sends sarees for you and ever so many things for Mangal. She loves Mangal like her own child, doesn't she?"

"Yes," said Zubeda in a hushed voice.

"Its the same with Bhai saheb. He is a good man basically. And one often has to do undesirable things for the sake of being alive. That is why he has to work in a factory. Work for the sake of getting his bread. But at least they are happy. They are not driven crazy by wants all hours of the day!"

He remained silent for a few moments. Then he placed his hookah on the floor and said with unusual vim—"I shall also go to my brother and work in the factory. Yes, I will."

The smoke seemed to choke his throat.

"No, no!" cried Zubeda in a muffled voice. "You cant work in a factory."

"Of course I can" said Badshah, stopping her.

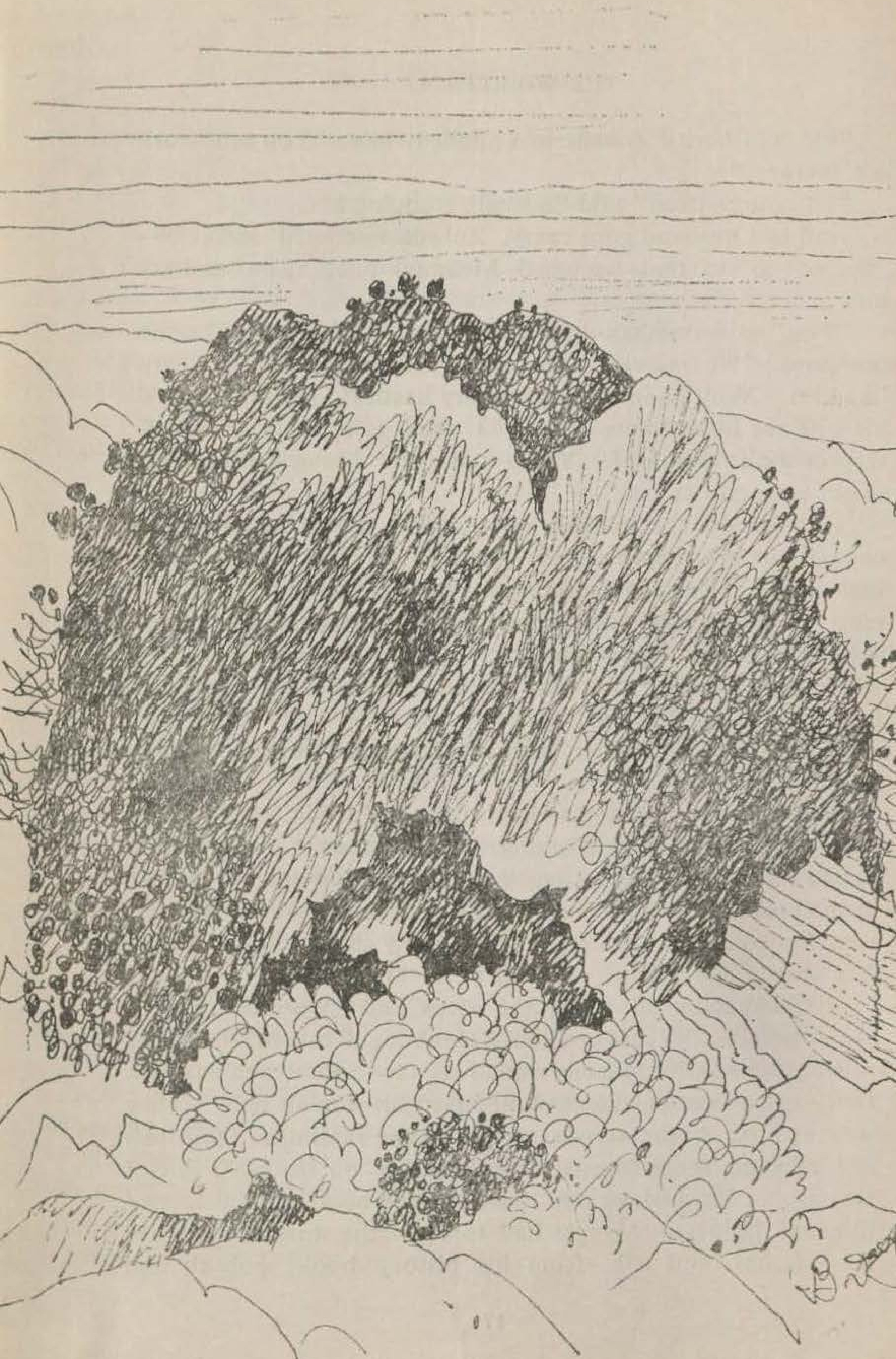
Had her husband gone crazy, Zubeda wondered and said—"Better go to that wretched Mahmud once again and ask him. . ."

"No," said Badshah in a firm voice. "My brother has no problems. No worries. He earns and eats. I too shall earn like him. Why go in for unnecessary hassles? My brother and his wife are like parents to me. I shall go to them. My self-respect shall be spared. Yours too. And Mangal will be able to eat properly at last."

He took up the hookah once again. His voice seemed to come from the depth of the earth as he said—"You don't understand, Mangal's mother, but there is absolutely no difference between a farm-labourer and a beggar. Mahmud's labourers are like cats and dogs. They have to scuttle under his feet the whole time and fast the year round. Robbed of home and land at the same time, in what way are they better than dogs and cats? No! I'd rather earn my bread the way my brother does."

Badshah stood up and walked up to Zubeda. "We must start early tomorrow morning. The steamer wont leave before one. But we can reach the ferry ghat only if we start at the crack of dawn. Then we can probably make it by mid-day. Do you understand?" Zubeda's reply choked in her throat. She merely nodded and went off to the kitchen.

Badshah climbed down the steps and opened the door of the cowshed. "Where are you, Sohrab and Rustam?" he called softly. He had affectionately named his oxen Sohrab and Rustam. Hefty and powerful, they had ploughed his sloping field. They were as huge as the horses owned by the zamindar. Badshah had selected them himself from the fair on the other side of the river. He had chosen these names because they looked like real fighters. Mangal had told him the story of the brave duo—father and son—from his history book. Sohrab and



Rustam! How romantic the names were! Badshah had felt that same glow of romance when he set his eyes on these two powerful oxen. Sohrab and Rustam came out at his call.

"Come on, I'll have to reach you to that killer. So it is fated," he said.

Zubeda came out, a lamp in her hand. "I'm going to take them there now, Mangal's mother." The oxen lifted up their dark eyes in mute wonder. To come out of the shed in the darkness! What did the strange happening mean, was beyond them to know. "Come on, my dears," said Badshah as he disappeared into the darkness.

Zubeda spent practically the entire night hunting out bags from various corners and tying up all their possessions into little bundles. She had barely slept for an hour when a slight touch on her hurt rib made her sit up with a start.

"Who is it?" she cried.

"Its me," said Badshah in a soft voice. "Its time to get up, Mangal's mother. We must start now." He shook Mangal gently. "Wake up, Mangal dear. Wake up."

Three little bundles. A mat and a lamp. That was all Badshah had, to call his own—his entire property, in fact! "You need not put on the burkha now," he told Zubeda. "You get into it after the sun rises on our way." He placed one bundle on the top of his head and the other in his hand. He shoved the rolled mat under his arm. Zubeda picked up the last bundle while Mangal carried the lamp.

Zubeda locked the door and walked out into the open, her eyes streaming with tears. Badshah's lips trembled as he stood in the courtyard. "I shall come back," he told himself. "I shall work hard and earn money. With that money I shall release my home and my land. My land by the riverside!"

It was quite dark still. There was a touch of autumn in the cool soft breeze. The morning star glowed in the sky. Glowed and glimmered! A small group consisting of just three people

walked forward like shadows on the winding path made slippery by recent rains. They walked by the trees, leaving deep footprints on the soft and sloping land towards the ferry ghat where the steamer would arrive. Badshah led the way followed by Mangal and finally Zubeda. "Walk a little faster, Mangal's mother," urged Badshah, "We must not miss the steamer." Badshah was keen to leave all familiar places behind before the sunlight grew any brighter.

They reached the ghat well before mid-day. Zubeda, already donning her burkha, sweated profusely. They put down their bundles and sat down a little away from the ticket-room. Badshah went off to get their tickets and enquire when the steamer would be in.

Zubeda opened one of the bundles and took out an old earthen bowl and some puffed rice. Mangal was hungry. Her man was no less hungry. Zubeda poured the puffed rice into the bowl and lifted the veil from her face. Then she looked at Badshah who was walking with a slight limp. "Mangal, fetch some water in this pot, darling," she said, handing him a brass pot.

Badshah returned after some time and sat down, stretching his arms and legs. "It wont take too long, Mangal's mother," he said. "The steamer will be in within an hour, they say."

When Mangal returned with the water every one sat down to a meal of puffed rice, jaggery and water. Zubeda sat facing the river, her face hidden behind Badshah. The river was full of fishermen's boats. Some were without sails. Others had their sails on. It was the season for *hilsa* fish. So the boats shuttled between the ferry ghat on this side and the distant coastline on the other. The topsy turvy breeze wheezed across the sandy bank. Water-kites spread out their wings against the same wild gust of air. They were many more in number than the boats.

Zubeda's breath grew restless like the wild waves in the river as it tossed and turned within her heart. All her thoughts grew wind-ruffled too. Eating mechanically, she started as she heard

a noise. "Its coming," said Badshah standing up. "Its coming, the steamer is coming, Mangal's mother. There's the whistle. Come on, tie up the bundles. Quick!"

Zubeda tied up the open bundle once again. Mangal tried to strain his eyes looking towards the distant shore, his hand on his forehead. Yes, something was indeed coming across the river cutting waves on both sides. The sandy bank was suddenly full of travellers. The whole place was chockfull of boxes and bundles of every shape and size. Badshah found himself confronting quite a few known people. They all asked—"Where are you off to, Badshah miya?"

"To my brother," said Badshah shortly. There was no need for details. Let him earn the money first and release his home and land and get rid of this nightmare—then he'd have plenty to say! One enjoys speaking of past sorrows and problems when one is happy once again!

The steamer stopped at the ghat. Every one got busy. Badshah picked up his bundles, balancing them on his head and arm. Zubeda picked up hers. "Mangal, where are you?" called Badshah. "Come, hold my other hand and also your mother's. Don't let go, whatever happens. Come closer to me, Mangal's mother."

But before they could walk more than a couple of steps someone called from behind. "Badshah miya!"

"Who is it?" asked Badshah in a troubled voice without turning his head.

"Its our Postman Uncle, Father," said Mangal.

"Ask him to come."

"He is coming."

The postman came up to him and asked, "Where are you going?"

"To the city. At my brother's place."

"I see. Well, the post came in very late last evening so I could not go to your place. I was about to visit you today as there are a few letters to deliver that side. There is a letter for you too. Here it is." He handed a post card to Badshah.

"Really?" cried Badshah in an anxious voice. "There is hardly any time left for the steamer to leave. Please read out the letter and tell me what it says."

Zubeda too grew anxious within her burkha.

The postman glanced at the letter and said—"Well, its from your brother Suleman. Understand? He says, Dear Brother, I hope you are doing well, by God's grace. I am very sorry to tell you that I have lost my job. Four hundred workers in the factory have been suddenly dismissed. Unfortunately, they include me too. I shall start for home with your Bhabi saheba the day after tomorrow. I hope your wife and Mangal. . . ."

Three people stood petrified amongst the bustling crowd, silent and still. It seemed as though they had just awakened from a trance. A huge black net seemed to fall over their eyes. All of a sudden the smoke-spurting black chimney of the factory coalesced with the sloping acre of land by the riverside and exploded with a terrifying roar inside their heads. They stood transfixed by the blare of the roar and the booming voices of the people around.

Tr. by SWAPNA DUTTA

'Abarta'

Shantiniketan*

SAMARESH BASU

WELL before the twentyfifth of Baisakh, the job was completed!

Nandalal had been rather worried. His chief source of anxiety was Ramkinkar. Ramkinkar had been appointed to do the art-work on the boundary walls of 'Shyamali', Rabindranath's favourite residence. If he were to spend the whole summer away at Bankura, he could not possibly finish his assignment on time. Fortunately however, Ramkinkar returned to Shantiniketan in the company of Sujit. He returned quietly without having told anybody in Bankura about his humiliating experience at the Goswami household. Who was there to complain to, anyway? To any low-caste person in Bankura, the conduct of Goswami Babu towards Ramkinkar would not seem offensive at all. Ramkinkar could not honestly claim that he had received better treatment in any other Brahmin household of the town.

For Ramkinkar, Shantiniketan was a different world. It had liberated his mind from the ancient trappings of Bankura and awakened it to fresh possibilities. Of course, the new world was not without its own problems. A strange sense of foreboding would grip Ramkinkar as he explored its fascinating byways.

*Excerpted from *Dekhi Nai Phire*, Samaresh Basu's last uncompleted novel.

He could not exactly place his problem. Certainly, he could not share it with Sujit. Never in his life had Ramkinkar graced a chair in a Brahmin's drawing-room. Never had he even expected such courtesy on the part of his hosts. No, not from Ramananda Chatterjee, nor from his favourite Jamini Chatterjee, nor even from the revolutionary, Baidyanath Mukherjee. During his several visits to the Mukherjee household in connection with the painting of stage-sets he had not once sat on a chair or a bench. Yet ever so often when he had taken a break for lunch, he had eaten his meal with the rest of the family. *That* was not thought to be unclean. There was no lack of warmth *then*. Everything had been done according to custom. No hitch had come in the way of tradition. Nobody's God had been desecrated.

Sujit Mukhopadhya was his friend. He did not belong to the Goswami lineage. He had merely married into this family of Bankura. His bearings lay elsewhere. He was a torchbearer of the Internationalist Movement at Shantiniketan. With the zeal of youth, he was quite prepared even to eat beef. At the request of Rabindranath himself, he had presided over weddings of the lower castes. It was just a quirk of fate that had linked him to the Goswami clan. Life's little ironies always work with great subtlety. It had seemed natural that Sujit should offer his friend a seat in the drawing-room of his in-laws' house. Or hadn't it? Should not Ramkinkar have known better than to accept the offer at face value? Should he not have recalled that he was about to do what he had never done during his life at Bankura? But in the first half of Baisakh of the year 1935, Ramkinkar forgot what he would have done well to remember, and accepted a seat in a Brahmin's house. In short, he graced a chair in the drawing room of Goswami Babu. Ten years of stay at Shantiniketan had rid him of an age-old prejudice. Sujit had asked him to sit down. And at that moment he had had no hesitation in accepting the chair. Retribution struck back at once, like a serpent with reared hood. Perhaps Sujit's intervention softened the sting to a certain extent. Beyond that Sujit

could do no more.

In solidarity with the humiliated Ramkinkar, Sujit had left the house of his in-laws that very day. Had he not done so, Ramkinkar might have found it difficult to leave Bankura at once. That had been a blessing in disguise indeed. He could not allow Sujit to leave alone. Sujit had been hurt to the core on his behalf. His generous soul had been pained deeply. His faith in human nature itself had been shaken. It was, therefore, impossible to let Sujit go away on his own. Ramkinkar was constrained to accompany him back to Shantiniketan.

And there he found, waiting eagerly for him, Nandalal, Suren Kar and the rest. 'Shyamali', Rabindranath's mud-hut had been completed. Only the wall-painting remained to be done. Ramkinkar began work almost as soon as he arrived. Once in a while he would run into Sujit. But the business at hand left him little time to brood over the affair of the Goswami household.

'Shyamali' had been designed by Surendranath. Of course, its original conception was that of Rabindranath. He had wanted for himself a mud-hut, that kind in which the ordinary rural-folk lived. A mud-hut with a thatched roof. The thatched roof was always a source of dread to village folk. Particularly in Birbhum district, which always suffered from a scarcity of water. Each year the roofs of several houses would be destroyed in conflagarations. Thus, serious thought had been given to the matter. It had been finally decided to go in for a mud rather than a straw roof. Using cement was out of the question. A mud-hut with a cement roof would be an incongruity.

These issues, weighty as they were, did not of course concern Ramkinkar. Barely was the crescent-shaped construction over, that he sat down with his sketch book and pencil. Nandalal had made a tentative suggestion, "Why not figures of tribal men and women? They will appear in bold relief against the back-drop of a mud wall. . . ."

Before his minds' eye, Ramkinkar invoked all the images of tribal life he had ever known, from his boyhood to that moment. He envisioned the shapes of hunters and fighters in their varied postures and gestures, seeking to transfer these shapes from the zone of reality to the zone of artistry. The result of his toils had fascinated not only Nandalal. Suren Kar had been equally moved by his creativity.

After his assignment at New Delhi's Modern School, this was Ramkinkar's first major relief painting venture. Soon after he had completed the work, the twentyfifth of Baisakh was upon them. Rabindranath himself would inaugurate the house on his birthday. It was to be a truly festive event. As long as work on the house was in progress, people would stop by, particularly on their way home from the fields, to admire its excellence. They had never before seen such a beautiful building in clay. Of special interest was the clay roof.

The inauguration itself was an inspiring affair. People came from near and from afar, to watch the function. Rabindranath mixed around freely with everybody. He even spoke a few words to the local people on the benefits of fire-proof mud-huts.

Ramkinkar watched the proceedings from the far end, standing among a group of tribal folk. They all knew who he was. They knew that it was he who had drawn the details of tribal life on the front wall of the new house. They looked at him with gratitude and endearment. Some of the men went as far as to pull him by the sleeve. "Do come to our village. Why not join us for a drink?" "Oh yes, please do," their women supported them in their invitations.

Ramkinkar looked at them and smiled. He was happy to share their happiness. "I don't drink", he said. "But will you treat me to pork?" An old woman within the group spoke up, "How can we cook you pork today? It takes time to kill a pig and roast its meat. Eating pork is not the same as eating mutton. One pig can feed a village. Give us a date, and we'll have your feast ready." Ramkinkar smiled once more at their

enthusiasm. He then raised his hand to silence them, murmuring softly, "I will go to your village and fix the date."

He recalled the time when Rasik the sweeper had cooked him some pork. That was the one and only occasion when he had tasted pork. There had been no other opportunity since then. It was in Rasik's room, at the western edge of the Centre for Art and Culture, that he had been asked to lodge after his return from Bankura. In any case, he no longer wished to lodge in the room of Madame Shaila. She had levelled too many allegations against him. Nandalal himself had brought up the matter one day before Ramkinkar's departure to Bankura. "Hey Kinkar, I hear the furniture in your room is disappearing gradually?" It did not take Ramkinkar long to guess the source of the complaint. For two successive years, Madame Shaila had come to Shantiniketan for the Paush Mela and discovered various pieces of furniture missing from her room. She had sternly interrogated Ramkinkar about the matter. "Well Madam", Ramkinkar had answered with a nervous smile, "What could I possibly do? It is difficult to refuse people when they ask for things—especially during this festival season." The explanation had not appeased Madame Shaila. Rather, it had aggravated her annoyance. "Difficult to refuse? What do you mean? How can you distribute my things to other people? Why should I tolerate it? How can I permit you to occupy my room under these circumstances?" Ramkinkar had not been able to satisfy the doubts of Madame Shaila. He had merely scratched his head in embarrassment. And he had also begun to think about alternative accommodation from that day.

Nandalal had formally communicated Madame Shaila's grievance to him. But he had been as worried as Ramkinkar himself about the problem of finding a second home for Ramkinkar. "We don't really have a place to house the students and teachers of our institution. I understand, from what the wife of Santhosh Babu has said to me, that you can no longer stay on at Madame Shaila's. Our institution has just started

constructing its own hostel. The rooms will be fairly large. May be you'll get place. . ."

"For a few days in the room on top of the wastern gateway," Ramkinkar grinned uneasily.

Nandalal's face lighted up with amusement. "Why on earth should you stay there? We have an empty room, provided you are not averse to living in it. Mud walls, thatched roof, framed in bamboo. The erstwhile residents have been evicted. I got too many reports of drunken disturbance caused by them in the evenings. Things are no longer as they used to be once upon a time. Times are changing. I am speaking about the rooms of Rasik and Feku, you know."

"I gather as much," Ramkinkar replied, his lips parting into a smile. "The sweepers' quarters are being evacuated. They are nice rooms. And well within our campus. If I could get a room to myself. . . ." Nandalal's face was suddenly tension-free. "Of course, you'll get a room to yourself when you get married, we'll see. . . ."

"O, yes, then we'll see," agreed Ramkinkar delightedly. "For the time being, I shall live in Rasik's room. There is a lovely kadam tree in front of the room."

Nandalal nodded gaily, "Well, so you can take up residence under the kadam tree. Just across the southern end of your room, you'll find the new hostel building coming up. We'll tar the outer walls of this structure black. The dark house, we'll name it."

Ramkinkar frowned in deep thought. "I don't think I've seen it," he said. "I thought the hostel building was to come up at one end of the playfields."

Nandalal laughed. "Well that's almost the same thing. Now, if you take up Rasik's room, someone else will lay claim to the room of Feku. I'm told that Mallikji is on the look-out for accommodation. May be he'll want that room. He loves to stay among the young students of our institution.

Feku's room was at the edge of the volleyball court, to the west of the hostel building. Rasik's room was in a south-

easterly direction. So Mallikji was to stay in the first room. A short and sturdy, banana-yellow complexioned gentleman. His face and head covered with snowy-white hair. In the eyes of Ramkinkar, a saintly scholar. He was the English teacher at the Educational Foundation. He had a habit of getting up at the crack of dawn. He would begin his day by loudly chanting hymns in praise of his Lord. What a sweet voice he had! A teacher by profession, he was also an accomplished singer of devotional songs. It takes all kinds of people to make the world.

Before Ramkinkar took possession of Rasik's room he had enquired anxiously of Nandalal, "Where will Rasik and Feku stay?" Nandalal laughed, "Oh no, we haven't driven them away. They have been provided dwellings in the tribal settlement on the way to the forest. Vishvabharati has acquired some more land towards the south and the west. Rasik and Feku have been accommodated there. After all, it's not just a question of the Centre, Sukumari Devi lives near the lake, Suren has his house a few steps towards the south. In the west is the house of Kali Mohan Babu. At the end of a hard day's work, you cannot expect Rasik and Feku to sit down for prayers, can you? They have a right to enjoy themselves in ways they like best. Hence, a little distance between them and the rest. So I take it. . . ."

Ramkinkar waited till his work on 'Shyamali' was over. Two days after its inauguration, he inaugurated the evacuated dwelling of Rasik in which he was to make a home. The room was quite large. Rasik himself had cleaned it up before his departure. The ceiling was not too high. But its bamboo frame enhanced its beauty. The thatched roof covered some space in the balcony as well. Inside, the room was rather dark. A thatched roof hardly allows for too much light. However, there was provision for lighting. On the eastern wall, Rasik had carved out a window. The window frame was made of

bamboo. There was even a pair of shaky latches. It was doubtful whether the window had been ever opened. Any way, Ramkinkar threw it open. Light streamed in at once. The darkness within the room was dispelled to a certain extent. But the window would not remain open on its own accord. It would shut down as soon as it was let alone. Ramkinkar was not particularly concerned about the window. He would deal with the problem later if he wished to keep the window open. After the days of vigorous labour on 'Shyamali', his life ex-pectedly felt empty. There was a kadam tree in front of his room. On the road diverging to the west, there stood what looked like a hazel-nut tree. Towards the north, just behind his room, there was a banana grove encircling a lake. The pro-prieter of the grove was no longer present. One tree had already flowered. It had been noticed by the kitchen staff. Ramkinkar wondered who would claim the fruits when they came.

Nandalal had not been mistaken. Mallikji had already established himself in Feku's room. Sukumari Aunty too had a hut nearby. Her presence was hardly perceptible. She had long bouts of illness. The doctor would come and diagnose her ailment, and then leave after writing his prescriptions. Scattered round these huts were three other huts which served as hostels for students. Some distance away in the south, under a huge neem tree, was the common room.

Ramkinkar picked up the bag containing his sketching tools. He loved to walk in a northerly direction. A hint of monsoon was already in the air. Just beyond the milkmen's colony was the colony of the musicians. Kali the Musician was now the mother of two—a son and a daughter. Annapurna, on the other hand, did not seem to have passed through such problems. She had managed not to put on much weight. Her face exuded mirth. Yet why the dark rings around her eyes? Kali was hardly even-tempered. Sometimes full of merriment, some-times down in the dumps. She would usually call the tune to Annapurna's dancing steps.

Though mother of two, she had a remarkably supple body. She could balance her body on one foot and touch her toe with one hand. Her figure was as rounded as ever. She was flawless in her steps. Only she was not able to dance for long. Tiredness would slow down her rhythm gradually. Quite oblivious of this, Ramkinkar would continue with his sketching. Sometimes the outline of a woman transformed itself into the outline of a tree. Sometimes a tree would change its form to become a woman. This was not a new preoccupation with Ramkinkar. But it had caught his fancy again of late.

Previously he had merely experimented with lines in the process of sketching figures. The broken arches of one portrait would develop into a second portrait. Then, almost miraculously, several portaits would merge into the original portrait. The game would go on and on, almost as though it were an addiction. The addiction had taken hold of him again, this time in terms of the portraits of entire figures. Not just human figures, but figures of trees as well.

Annapurna, his friends' spouse, knew nothing about art. She merely knew that the artist enjoyed drawing her rhythmic postures during the dance. She was his Valentina. Yet how insensitive he could be! After a while Annapurna could dance no more. Ramkinkar looked up in surprise, "Why, what's the matter?" An elderly neighbour, sitting nearby, chuckled through her gap-teeth. "She doesn't have a thing in her tummy."

Annapurna looked down in mortification. Ramkinkar burst out laughing. "Oh! so you are hungry? You ought to have told me earlier. Go get some rice and cook it. You can dance again after you've eaten." So saying, he put his hand into his pocket and proffered all the money that he had to Kali. Kali accepted the money and smiled at everyone.

Monsoon gradually passed into autumn. Ramkinkar did not go to Bankura. He still went on his daily rounds, with his sketch-bag on his shoulder. At the end of each day, he would stop by a Jogin's tea-shop for a gossip-session. He and

Binodbehari were the favourite at these sessions. Nandalal too would drop in now and then. The short-tempered Jogin did not deign to serve tea to all his customers. He certainly did not welcome riff-raff to his stall. But he never said no to the followers of Ramkinkar.

During the month of April, in the new year according to the Christian calendar, Nandalal got tied up with the Lucknow session of the All India Congress Committee. Rather than take the entire burden on his own shoulders however, he sought some paintings from Jamini Roy as well. But by the year-end came the Faizpur session and Gandhiji's personal message that he should attend. The responsibility of decorating the stage was to be his. Meanwhile, another artist, a young man, had come from the south. His name was Padabi Perumal, a boy, dark and short in stature. Recruited too was the artist Kanai Samanta. Nandalal started for Faizpur with these two companions.

Before Ramkinkar's eyes floated the image of a tribal family. He had drawn this image before leaving for Delhi, sitting in front of a room of the tribal settlement. Before leaving for Delhi, he had managed to deposit his work at the institute. That was in November 1933. It was now December 1936. During this gap, the image had invaded his consciousness repeatedly. The tribal man with the tribal woman to his left. A small package on the woman's head. An infant tied to her left waist. The man carrying two baskets suspended from either end of a long pole hung across his shoulder. The basket in front holding his little son. The basket behind their household things. Behind the couple came a dog, following them to their new abode.

Where was that image? That outline which had to be realised in clay? How else would the image find substance? Determinedly, he walked back to his room. Before entering his room, he once more envisioned the haunting figures of the tribal

family he had painted.

Yes, there were the figures hurrying on as fast as ever. His room was lit up by the western sun which peered through the gaps in the kadam leaves. From the volleyball court to the east floated the sounds of laughter and rejoicing of girls at play. Birds stopped their singing in surprise. Even the squirrel which had run down the tree ran up again out of sheer fright.

"Hey you!"

Ramkinkar stopped in his tracks. A woman wearing a saree with brown stripes and red border, the loose end dropping off her hand. No blouse on her body. No sindoor on her forehead. A dim red mark at the parting of her hair. Her jet-black hair tied into a bun. No dust or dirt anywhere. Only a few marks of dry *mehndi*. Was that collyrium with which she had darkened her eye-brows? And were those stains of betel-juice reddening her lips? A beautiful nose-ring shone on her nose. Her eyes were not very wide, but there was a sparkle which lit them up constantly. Her form wrapped in brown seemed to be on fire. The dazzle on her brass bangles only confirmed the impression. Did Ramkinkar recognize this woman?

"Where were you, pray? I haven't seen you for ages." The tone of voice seemed familiar enough. A strange eagerness illuminated her face. She stepped forward doubtfully. "Don't you recognise me? I—I—when you made the image of the tribal couple? In the tribal settlement, sitting before me. Then. . . ."

Ramkinkar looked down at the courtyard. Yes, it was indeed she who was standing before him. Was it she? Of course, it was, though her clean dress, well-groomed hair, shining nose-ring and rosy lips now gave her a different look altogether. As if she was no longer a wood-gatherer. Somewhere, somehow she was different, though she was the same. Ramkinkar inwardly felt hesitant, uncertain. Outwardly, he nodded his head.

"So you can recognise me?" The doubt seemed to be clearing from the woman's face as she moved forward closer still. "Do you remember my name? I am Khandu of Bhuvandanga." Ramkinkar advanced towards the door. He remembered a different woman, a wood-gatherer who had nothing to wear but a tattered and dirty saree. *She* was Khandu of Bhuvandanga. The woman standing before him appeared well-to-do. Whither this transformation? What had this woman to do with the tribal settlement of his memory?

"Why are you leaving me out?" She swept up behind him like a wave. "You have forgotten me? Are you trying to get rid of me? Why? Have I ever been unkind to you? Have I ever disobeyed you? I have missed you so long. Have searched for you all over. Dreamt of you. Won't you ask me into your room?" Tears stood at the corners of her eyes.

Ramkinkar made an effort to enter his room. His mind was divided in a bitter struggle between indecision and desire. Reminiscences of a three-years-old affair crowded his brain. Khandu blocked his entry. "I have come at last You are more than any blood-relation. . . ."

Ramkinkar edged in through the doorway, merging with the darkness of the room. Khandu followed him in, closing the door behind her. There was no light anywhere. But Ramkinkar sensed Khandu coming towards him in the dark.

He drew the tribal couple once again, this time on golden-brown silk. A work of a thick brush. Accompanied by some strokes with a new boot-brush. Nothing to do with paper and pencil. Just paint tying up silk and brush. Ramkinkar's new students saw this as his greatest accomplishment. He smiled. This sketch had taken him back to oil-painting. Although, ironically enough, he had wanted to do it in clay. He had even mentioned the project to Nandalal before Nandalal's departure for Faizpur. Nandalal had consented, asking him to carry on with his scheme on the roof which

would ultimately be developed into a sculptor's studio. So he had gathered both the finance and the encouragement. All that he now needed was to begin the work.

Meanwhile, a newcomer had attracted his notice. A long-limbed, fun-loving girl. Esther Jayanti Jayappaswami. A student at the Educational Foundation. Chocolate-complexed. Yet, if popular opinion were to be credited, with a grace unparallelled in the history of Shantiniketan. Ramkinkar did not quite see her in that way. But he did notice her, and in noticing her he took some time to look the other way. The girl smilingly came forward to introduce herself. She addressed him in English. "Kinkarda, my name is Esther Jayanti Jayappaswami. I am a great admirer of your art. Also your songs."

"My songs?" Ramkinkar could not help guffawing. "Well that's very good. I'll sing to you everyday. But will you really appreciate my Bengali songs?"

Esther's eyes opened wider as she smiled, "I can appreciate Gurudev's songs. And many other songs. Particularly in the southern tongues. And I shall make it a point to learn Bengali in the shortest possible time. Do tell me why the local girls do not want to socialise with me?"

"How do you expect them to socialise with you?" Ramkinkar pointed out with a grin. "You speak in English. Everybody is not like me—quite un-self-conscious about their English-speaking ability."

Esther giggled. "Kinkarda, you are really sweet. From now on we're friends. But, please don't call me Esther. Call me Jayanti."

"Perhaps I ought to call you Jaya," Ramkinkar suggested. "Jaya from Jayappaswami. If you are called Jaya, then people will think you are a Bengali. Many Bengali girls are called Jaya."

Did Esther have any objections to this? She did not fancy becoming a Bengali altogether. Yet she nodded at Ramkinkar. "Okay. You may call me Jaya."

"Fine," said Ramkinkar happily. "Now tell me where you'll chat with me. I wish to strike a deal with you."

"What deal?" asked the girl curiously.

"You'll model for me. I'll sketch you."

Esther was pleased, though her face reddened in a blush. "I'm a terribly lanky figure. Do you really wish to paint me?"

"Not terribly," Ramkinkar laughed. "Actually your lanky figure is beautiful."

Esther could not say anything in her embarrassment and pride. She accompanied Ramkinkar to his room. He did an oil-painting of her on canvas to begin with. A few days later, he sculpted her figure in clay. A small girl with ponytails holding a mat in her hand. The original Esther had disappeared from the scene. Gazing upon his creation, Ramkinkar gradually fell into a trance.

Tr. by TAPAN BASU

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Samaresh Basu: A Memory

SUNIL GANGOPADHYAYA

SAMARESH Basu emerged as a writer exactly one decade before I did. He was considered a rising sun on the field of letters at a time when I was just entering college. He was, at that time, writing in *Parichay*, *Desh* and a number of other periodicals. As far as I can remember my first introduction to Samaresh Basu's writing was through a fantastic short story called *Akal Brishti* (Unseasonal Showers) published in one of the obscurer journals. Around that time I was crazy about poetry and my publications were restricted to volumes of poems. A poet does not, as a rule, read prose. But I had the habit of reading a number of journals from cover to cover. It was in this manner that I was enabled to follow Samaresh Basu's ascent and development as a writer.

Soon after the serialization of *Amrita Kumbh er Sandhane* (Quest for the Pot of Nectar) in *Desh* under the pseudonym *Kalkut*, Samaresh Basu became a writer of repute. Dilip Kumar Gupta of Signet Press, publisher of what was then considered the high brow in literature, declared his intention of awarding a gold fountain pen to the author of *B.J. Road er Dhaare* (By the Side of B.J. Road). Many eminent writers from Tara Shankar to Narayan Gangopadhyaya felicitated Samaresh Basu on the occasion. Coffee house litterateurs like myself had already idolized him.

When one is attracted to a writer's work a yearning to discover the man necessarily follows. In those days many stories about Samaresh—true and false - were circulated. He rarely visited the coffee houses but was often seen among the book stalls in College Street. Though not very tall he was an exceptionally handsome man with an ever smiling face. He was also, on more than most occasions, extremely well turned out Though not very well off—his early years had been spent in acute poverty and at that time he had no residence in Culcutta but commuted by train from Naihati—his clothes were always impeccable. I have never seen him wearing anything shabby or soiled. There are very few people in the world whose natural good taste and scrupulously clean habits assert themselves over all odds.

In 1965, the Autumn Number of *Desh* saw the publication of *Bibar* (Cave). I remember the year because the very next saw my own entry in the field of fiction. After the publication of *Bibar* Santosh Kumar Ghosh wrote a letter to *Desh* acclaiming the novel as one of the ten best in the Bengali language. It is a rare occurence in the history of literature for an established writer to praise the work of a contemporary in quite such terms. Immediately afterwards *Bibar* was turned into a hotbed of controversy. The next year saw the publication of *Prajapati* and the controversy took on an added dimension. In Calcutta University, Rabindra Bharati and many other institutions, seminars and symposiums were organised to determine the constituents of the decent and the obscene in literature. I do not know why, but I was often invited to participate in these seminars. From this time onwards my association with Samaresh Basu became closer and more intimate. I had seen him off and on many times before this – in Sagarmoy Ghosh's room and in Santosh Kumar Ghosh's office. Once the latter took me (practically forcibly) to Samaresh Basu's house in Naihati where his first wife Gouri Devi was celebrating the first anniversary of her music organization. Many leading intellectuals and singers including Sagarmoy Ghosh and

Suchitra Mitra were present.

In the above mentioned seminars Samaresh Basu would defend his stand with spirit. I generally made light of the subject when called upon to comment. In my opinion nothing that has been written in the Bengali language to date can be termed obscene. If *Bibar* and *Prajapati* (Butterfly) is pornography what then is *Tropic of Cancer*? But the discussion would sometimes get quite heated. There was an air of extremism in politics at that time. Left Wing and Right Wing were both veering towards the extreme. And surprisingly both groups were united in their ideal of what constitutes the ethical in literature. Some of them even threatened Samaresh Basu with physical assault. But he was unafraid and undisturbed. *Swikarokti* (Confession) and *Patak* (Sin) followed.

Quite often, after one of these sessions, we would sit together for a chat. Although he had a vast circle of friends and admirers he was gradually drawn to our circle. One day he commented on the absence of back-stabbing and defamation in our discussions and said that it was quite 'remarkable. We were a completely apolitical organisation and there was no discrimination between writers on the panels of reputed journals and those of obscure journals. I myself, at that time, wrote primarily for the lesser periodicals and edited a practically unknown journal. At night we all went to Sealdah Station to see him off. He would always return to Naihati by the last train.

Sometime later he rented a small flat in Ballygunge Station Road. That was his first home in Calcutta—a cosy little nest with his second wife Dharitri nicknamed Tuni. For the first time in my life I had the opportunity of observing a reputed writer's daily routine at first hand. Every morning, religiously, he would sit down to write. In the stifling heat of the afternoon he would still be writing. Once when I went to his house in hope of a chat he smiled embarrassedly and told me he was writing. Writing was, to him, a discipline that he had to follow relentlessly. People who work in offices can afford to neglect their work. After all someone else can do what they

are doing just as well but writers, artists and scientists cannot, for their work is their own.

Many people believe that literary creation depends on inspiration and that inspiration is a rare phenomenon. In reality, one has to induce inspiration. The most important part of a writer's work is, to him, the first line. Once in a while this may present itself like a flash of lightning quite often only to be lost irretrievably. The way to get the first line, in most cases, is to sit for hours before a blank sheet of paper. That is why it is important for writers to write every day even if the output is ultimately abandoned. We are told that Rabindranath Tagore sat down to write every morning through all the upheavals of his life. So did Samaresh Basu who, to my mind, was the living example of the disciplined writer.

Samaresh Basu had made up his mind that he would make writing his life work and not waste time in anything else. Such a resolution was right if a little risky. Music, art and literature are jealous skills demanding the entire body of their pursuer's time and talent. The importance of relaxation for the artist and his need to travel and to indulge his innate interests cannot be minimised but unfortunately in our country the totally committed artist can hardly afford these things. The painter is forced to join a pharmaceutical company and the poet has to spend the best part of his life correcting proofs in a newspaper office. I have seen an artist like Debabrata Biswas checking the accounts in an Insurance Company. Yet many years back Manik Bandopadhyaya had decided to devote himself exclusively to Bengali literature inspite of the fact that he had a family to support. During our life time it was Samaresh Basu. When we first came to know him he was struggling against acute proverty. That was why he was so prolific. He wrote extensively both in his own name and the pseudonyms *Kalkut* and *Bhramar*. Not that all he wrote was brilliant. In such a vast bulk of writing excellence cannot be uniformly achieved. But the critics of our country cannot understand this and their comments are rarely of any value. If out of a writer's ten



works four are good, three mediocre and three bad, critics will be sure to ignore the first four, finger at the next three and concentrate on the last three. Samaresh Basu ignored his critics completely and rightly so.

The need to earn a living was always behind him but his work itself admits not a hint of his compulsions. He never repeated his themes and was always successful in introducing something new in each work. After a hard day's work he was, in the evening, a different man. As far as I know he never took up the pen after dusk. I have heard that the eminent translator of the *Mahabharata*—Haridas Siddhanta Bagish, believing that man's powers are on the decline after sunset, never wrote anything after dark. Our Kayastha novelist from Naihati likewise followed in the footsteps of the ancient Brahmins. Every evening Samaresh Basu would sally out, beautifully dressed, for the long awaited gossip session with his friends. Literary discussions, singing, even dancing were part of these sessions. These literary/musical evenings were

such a prominent feature of his day that if he spent even one evening at home his wife Tuni would be worried about his health.

Then came war with Bangladesh. This was such an exciting time in our lives that we often spent nights in newspaper offices debating on the outcome. Samaresh Basu was often with us. He had been born in East Bengal and had spent his early youth in Dhaka. It was no wonder that the Bangla war of liberation should have been of utmost concern to him. After the war Samaresh Basu became equally popular in Bangladesh.

At that time there was no reigning king in Bengali literature and Basu was the one who could be considered the Crown Prince of Letters. He wrote in quick succession—*Kothai Pabo Taare* (Where shall I find Him), *Ganga* (The Ganges), *Manush Ratan* (Human Jewel) and *Pari* (Flight). A few years later, when we were struggling with the journal *Krittibas,* attempting to introduce prose writing into what had hitherto been exclusively devoted to poetry, Samaresh Basu took the initiative in offering a serial novel for it. Ours was a purely unprofessional venture—there was no question of paying the contributors—yet Samaresh Basu who was the idol of readers and could have his pick of journals offered to write for us.

Around this time he had his first heart attack. It was not a serious one but some extra careful doctor warned him not to climb any steps and advised him to shift to a ground floor residence. At that time Samaresh Basu had left his apartment in Ballygunge Station Road and moved to a first floor flat in Park Circus. The problem was—where was he to go after being discharged from the hospital ? Kalyan Choudhuri offered him a room in his newly constructed house in Jodhpur Park and Samaresh Basu was installed there. But how long could the Crown Prince of Bengali Letters be content to live in someone else's house. Within days he was back at his writing table in Park Circus. Completely ignoring his ill health he plunged once more into his routine life. His writing was as chiselled

as ever—his passion for living as vibrant. The only concession he made to his ailing heart was that he attempted to give up smoking. At first he smoked half a cigarette at a time, then bidis, finally contenting himself with a puff now or then from someone else's cigarette. After a second attack in Darjeeling he gave up smoking altogether. Around this time he wrote *Shikal Chhera Hater Khoje* (In Search of the Unfettered Hand), *Mahakash er Rath er Ghora* (The Horse of the Sky Chariot) and *Tana Poren* (Opposite Pulls).

Around the beginning of the eighties we started a club called *Budh Sandhya*. Its principal activities were gossip, consuming liquor, reading stories and poems and backbiting—sometimes a little involvement in social causes. We would help arranging charity shows from time to time to aid some social service-based institution. The club had Sagarmoy Ghosh as Chairman, Samaresh Basu as Vice Chairman and myself as Secretary. The first play we put up was Rabindranath's *Mukta Dhaara*. What we enjoyed, even more than the actual show, were the long-drawn-out rehearsals—we had rehearsed for over a year. Samaresh Basu was to play the role of the Minister and came regularly for rehearsal. The show was scheduled for two nights at Rabindra Sadan. On the first night, as Sagarmoy Ghosh was introducing the play, an over enthusiastic actor called out his lines, "Fire! Fire!" Sagarmoy Ghosh handled the situation with his usual expertise. "The fire is somewhat premature" he remarked before walking into the wings "Let me see what I can do—" That was not all. Buddhadev Guha, doing the role of Dhananjay Bairagi, stopped in the middle of a song and stood scratching his head. Samaresh Basu skipped two pages of dialogue throwing co-actor Jayant Sen completely off gear. The next night everything went off perfectly but the people who had seen both shows insisted that the first night's performance had been better.

Samaresh Basu was a born actor. In fact, his talents could be geared in any direction. Though keen on theatre he could not take part in our subsequent plays—his health was gradually

failing him. Around this time he was getting ready to write on the artist Ramkinkar Beij. At first he wanted to make it a biography. Ramkinkar was alive at that time and Samaresh was meeting him regularly. The work was slated to be published during Ramkinkar's lifetime but Samaresh's health being delicate, he could not risk the book's serialization before he had written a fair-sized chunk. Samaresh was still writing when Ramkinkar suddenly passed away. When Ramkinkar's body was being taken out of the gates of P.G. Hospital Samaresh broke down completely. Such, it seemed to me, was the eternal tragedy of the creator and his creation.

Samaresh now gave up the idea of an authentic biography in favour of a biographical novel on Ramkinkar Beij. *Dekhi Nai Phire* (I did not Look Back) was serialized in *Desh* from 1986 onwards. A couple of years before this he had given me six instalments to read. This was uncharacteristic. He was, after all, Samaresh Basu. His novels went straight to the press and people saw them only in print. But he had become particularly fastidious about this work. He had researched extensively and collected a lot of material. The novel began, like a classic, from the beginning of Ramkinkar's life. I felt that it should start with the dawn of his artistic career—the early years of his life covered by a flashback.

Just as a baby tests its newly found teeth on everything around him so a newly discovered book has to be shared by its discoverers. From one of my journeys abroad I had brought back a fictional biography of the artist Auguste Rodin called *Naked Came I*—an extremely dramatic and chiselled piece of work. One evening I initiated a vigorous discussion on the book. Rodin was relatively unknown in Calcutta. His bronze castings had not yet been exhibited. Therefore very few people knew about him or his art. Samaresh Basu, himself researching on an artist, may have been quite knowledgeable. He had not, however, come across the book. He borrowed it from me and had several discussions regarding it and his proposed novel with me and many other people. The upshot was that he re-wrote

the opening chapters not once but several times.

A busy writer, he was involved with other projects while researching for and writing *Dekhi Nai Phire*. It is not possible for a writer in our country, however great he may be, to devote himself to a single work for several years. He has to fill pages to be able to live. That was why the Ramkinkar novel got so delayed. It is a matter of infinite regret to me that the work for which he had laboured so indefatigably—journeying from Assam and Manipur to New Delhi in search of material—a work that could have been his magnum opus was perforce left unfinished.

On a trip that we had taken to Darjeeling together I used to see him swallowing six or seven tablets with breakfast. It always shocked me to see the number and variety of medicines he had to take. In those days he was suffering from acute asthma. Asthma patients are, as a rule, advised to avoid cold weather and heights. But Samaresh Basu could forget his ailments in his great enthusiasm for travel and sightseeing. We had been invited to attend a function that was of some historical interest. Three years ago Darjeeling celebrated the hundred and fiftieth year of its birth. A vast symposium of Nepalese and Bengali writers was organised. But once there, we realized that we knew nothing about one another. In his speech Samaresh suggested that the Nepalese language be included in the Nepalese papers. Next morning his opinion was published in the eighth schedule. Even that, however, failed to bring us any closer. Although Subhas Ghising was unheard of in those days voices were raised against Bengalis being invited to the festival. On subsequent occasions no Bengalis were invited to Darjeeling.

Samaresh Basu went abroad for the first time in his life to Soviet Russia at the age of sixty—that too as part of a large group and for just a week. In 1986 he travelled to Europe. I was with him in West Germany, West Berlin, East Berlin, France and England. I was a pained but mute witness to the struggle that went on continually between his indomitable spirit and his physical incapacity. He was keen to see everything

but was easily fatigued. A slight chill and his breathing difficulties would start. It is impossible to sightsee in Europe without extensive walking nor is it possible to evade the cold. From time to time he would stop short, lines of pain scarring his face, and murmur: "I will come again when my health is better. After I finish my novel on Ramkinkar I will come and see everything properly."

He held on to his hopes to the last. Even when he drew his last breath, perhaps he did not believe that Death was real.

Tr. by ARUNA CHAKRAVARTI



Samaresh Basu: A Literary Assessment

ESHA DEY

ONE of the most prolific writers in the modern Bengali literature, Samaresh Basu towered over all his contemporaries for sheer wealth of versatility and consistently high level of narrative techniques. Whether it was the cause of the dispossessed in rural or urban setting, or the complexities of the middle class psyche or a re-telling of the First Poet Valmiki's great transformation, the vast range of his themes blended with a distinctive mode of writing and a subtle control over the regional nuances of spoken word. What is more, he stood out as the only one of the "committed" writers who, while ferociously loyal to the basic ideal of humanism, had the courage and integrity to rise above political ideology.

As a novelist Samaresh Basu began in the heyday of Bengali realism and perhaps more than others, benefitted from many of the great masters of the realistic Bengali fiction. His learning process included attempts at assimilating Tarashankar's penetrating roots in the soil, Bibhutibhusan's sensitive appraisal of the individual, Manik's incisive psychological analysis and Satinath's careful experimentation towards artistic excellence. He combined these methods of evoking the real with his own growing sense of it, based on his life's experiences as a draughtsman, an unemployed poor youth, a wanderer, a freelance

writer. The upshot of it all was that people came unusually alive in his books, for instance the fishermen in *Ganga* and the weavers in *Tanaporen*. Also, his *Uttaranga* and *Jagaddal* have remained to this day the most authentic depiction of the traumatic transition from a decaying, rural, agrarian existence into an industrial and aggressive mode of life.

As the foremost exponent of the realistic genre, Samaresh Basu may well appear to be the greatest critic of the Bengali society. Did he not deal untiringly with that singular trait of the Bengali life, namely, the ever-growing and dominating political consciousness? The turbulent 20's were captured in *Shreemati Cafe* (1953), and the limited achievement of so-called progressive movements in numerous novels and stories culminating in *Shekal Chchenra Hater Khonje* (1984). The latter was a perceptive and far-reaching indictment of the petit bourgeois left-wingers who had deprived the working class of its true character. Nor would one forget the utter brilliance of the vignettes of the lumpen proletariat in the series *Khinchakwala Samachar*, or the vibrant and heart-rending pathos of *Shahider Ma*, where a lonely mother recreates in her mind the birth of her dead son, killed in a political feud in which her other sons and her husband are also implicated. No one but Samaresh Basu could have presented such deep humanism proclaiming the victory of life in the midst of utter debasement of man and ideal. Dostoevsky's profound Christian compassion, which transcended the murky cross currents of anarchist degradation, offers perhaps the only parallel.

Despite all these unquestionable laurels in the field of realistic fiction, Samaresh Basu did not rest content with studies in social, political or psychological aspects of life, perhaps because, fundamentally as an artist he regarded life as a pilgrimage, seeking to find out its meaning or absence of meaning. To reach beyond the world of space and time, either as a hankering of the soul or the unnameable void of the being became the increasing preoccupation of Shree Basu in his maturer middle period. The existential anguish of man's alienation from all

human values found the most remarkable expression in *Bibar* (1964). In this classic work, Samaresh Basu unmasked ruthlessly all the pet illusions of the Bengali bourgeosie with penetrating insight as well as devastating irony and wit. This analysis was further elaborated in novels like *Prajapati* and *Bishwas* to demonstrate that the yawning void and fissures in man's life cannot perhaps be wholly blamed on the so-called intrusion of the western and alien influence alone. Gradually, there emerges what seems to be a basic urge in human beings—at least in some of them—to respond to the call of the instinct over and above rationality. In a later novel like *Param Ratan* (1973) an apparently contented and successful house-holder after bouts of extramarital affairs, ends up as yogi renouncing everything. In *Punaryatra* (1982) a young extremist in hiding discovers his ancestor's autobiography in Sanskrit and learns how the erstwhile happy and prosperous brahmin, accidentally cast out of society, embarked upon a restless life of adventure, and murdered an arrogant British soldier and an abnominable vaishnava lecher without the slightest qualm. Finally unable to settle down, he broke off the newly-formed ties with a loving woman in order to get out in search for the unknown. One may call this urge destructive or romantic depending on one's view-point.

The yearning for something afar finds the most vivid articulation in *Shamba* (Sahitya Akademi Award, 1980), a marvellously executed cameo of the ancient myth retold from the *Mahabharata* in the light of modern consciousness. Prince Shamba, afflicted with the dreadful disease of leprosy, refusing to submit to the irrevocable fate, undertakes a long and arduous journey in quest for cure in the course of which he comes across a wooden replica of the sun-God, the divine healer at the confluence of Sindhu and Chandrabhaga and realises, "Nothing is meaningless in life." Shamba's glorious affirmation developed to its full aesthetic completion in the novel, does not however constitute a facile "Indian" answer to Albert Camus or to the West. It is fundamentally the story of a man's attempt to meet



the challenge of his own self. Shamba therefore reaches fulfilment in human existence not as a Kshatriya prince performing his tradition-bound duty, but as an outsider in the contemporary society to which he never returns even after the cure. He has heard the call of that self which goes out in the vast and variegated reality of time and space—an eternal wanderer for whom any habitation is merely an earthly tabernacle.

It is the exploration of this self that Samaresh Basu undertook in his mature and highly individual form of fictional travelogue, a loose narration of sequences shuttling constantly between past and present, organically held together by the central theme of detachment as the guiding principle of all the characters. In *Kothay Paba Tare* (1968) we find the apotheosis of this quest as the essence of human condition focussed on the underlog as the visionary. In *Deshi Manush* the protagonist subsists on the periphery of the rigorously tiered Hindu society as the wanderer roaming about the countryside of Bengal from one fair to another. Without caste, creed or codified religion, he draws sustenance from the indigenous roots of spirituality going far back beyond Aryanisation. Dependent on charity, leading a real hand-to-mouth existence the characters of this

group remain in the hand of Shree Basu astonishingly untouched by the sordidness of poverty. Going through the gallery of these dispossessed—Gaji, Gopidas, Bhairabi—one feels the very touch of our earth which has endowed these creatures of dust with such fullness of being. Samaresh Basu's wonderful sense of aesthetic proportion never turned them into over-blown larger-than-life posters of the so-called Indian spirituality. They talk only in dialect and slang, sign the cult of the body or *dehatattava* (which means neither ascetic denial nor sensual indulgence but the cultivation of the entire person) and make friends as they meet one another. In short, they are complete human beings for whom life itself is a *Sadhana*.

Yet the portrayal of a timeless pattern of existence transcending contemporary concern of blood and mire exists very much side by side with the depiction of other characters like the narrator, Achinda, Jhini—all of whom are drawn from the urban upper caste and middle class background. Stained so-to-say by all the pain and anxiety of the temporality, they try to come to terms with the incompleteness and misery of their lives in a journey from fair to fair. All these characters meet on the road and although nothing earthshaking seems to happen, yet an invisible alchemy unites them which leads the modern non-believer narrator, on autobiographical projection of the author, to stand before the deity in an ancient temple and feel:

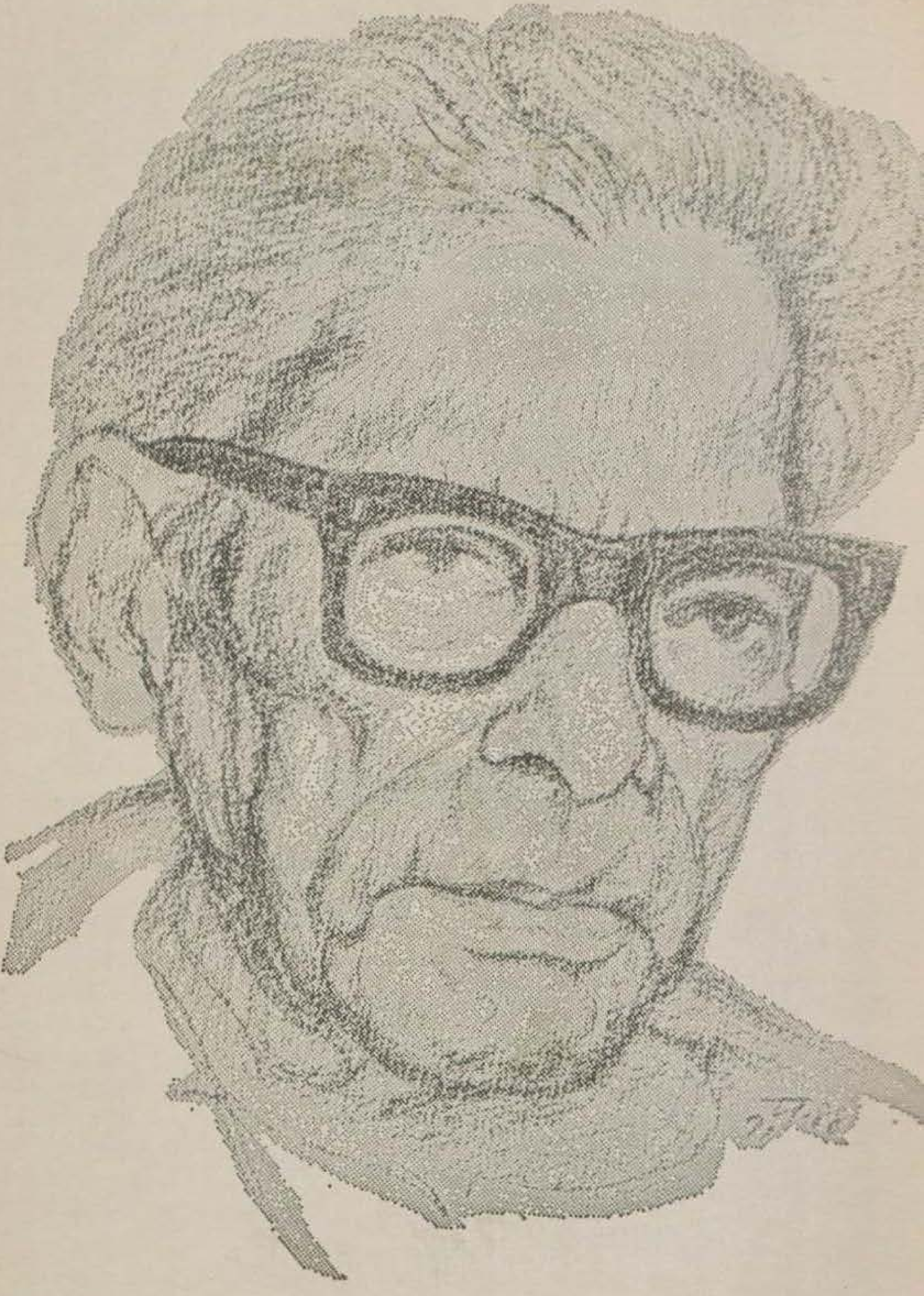
> I only think I am not here, no longer in the present. . . as though for thousands of years I have been walking on and on, placing my steps on the footmarks of others. From far and far away I come following the shadow of none but myself. Not alone, but with many millions. . .

Samaresh Basu's greatest achievement lies in "joining the isolation of the past" with "the incomplete present" and in transforming the two into a whole existence. In this novel therefore a sense of fullness overwhelms the former void of alienation. Nothing separates the low caste illiterate woman

who has left her family for the love of a tantric monk and the high caste, educated Jhini who mourns over personal losses and betrayals, for, both meet on the road, in the attempt to go beyond the suffering that every human relationship in this world inevitably entails. All are ultimately pilgrims. Samaresh Basu was perhaps the only writer who presented in an aesthetic construct the emergence of a new harmony out of the dissensions that ravage modern India.

SHORT STORIES





PREMENDRA MITRA (1904-88)

The Coward

PREMENDRA MITRA

KARUNA brought me the morning tea herself. At the sight of the many snacks that went with it I could not resist a smile: "The climate here must be very healthy. But remember that I came only two days ago. My appetite, unfortunately, is still what it was in my native Bengal."

Karuna only smiled and pushed the dishes towards me.

"Are you being formal with me?" I asked as she was about to leave, "I would have understood if Bimal Babu—but. . ."

Karuna cut me short—"Perhaps what I'm doing is only on behalf of Bimal Babu! You don't mind, do you?"

Then she smiled and left the room.

I sat silent over a cooling cup of tea. I had to admit, even to myself, that Karuna's behaviour was very odd.

I never expected Karuna to do anything dramatic. In fact it was a prospect that I had dreaded. That is why, at the outset, I was so pleasantly reassured by her serene naturalness. But somewhere, in some quiet corner of the self there was a sense of hurt vanity that gradually started surfacing. There was no need really, I thought, for such a drastic change. The sun had set, it was true, but some faint touches of colour could still have clung to the clouds in the west. If Karuna had been cold and silent I would have been happiest. I would have understood that it was only a mask with which she was hiding her real feelings.

But Karuna was neither emotional nor devoid of emotion. She was completely natural.

Of course I could have told myself that I did not care. In fact that is what I should have done. After all we had lost ourselves among the many people in the vast world and I had neither hoped nor feared that I would ever see her again. Yet when we met once again I found that though I believed I had forgotten Karuna completely I wanted her to have remembered me. This little arrogance was not unnatural when one considers the past.

It had been a day of such incessant rain that I was forced to spend it in my hotel room—unable to get out. Towards evening the servant boy came up and said that a girl was waiting to see me. When Karuna walked in I was shocked and bewildered.

"You are surprised, aren't you?" she said.

"Yes, I confess I am—" I added hastily, "but you are completely wet!"

Karuna lowered herself into a chair, "If one goes out in the rain one has to get wet" she laughed, "but don't worry about me. Even if you do, you won't find dry clothes for a woman in your room."

"There is a married couple in No. 10," I ventured.

Karuna laughed once more, "You mean you will borrow a sari and blouse for me?" Then she became serious, "Come and sit down. Wet clothes won't hurt me. You must be wondering why I came."

I did not answer. Karuna sat quiet—almost absently—for a while. Then, abruptly, she rose and throwing herself against my chest burst into tears. "They are taking me away to Patna. Uncle wrote a letter—" she said between sobs.

It was not that I did not understand. I only pretended not to when I said, "Your college vacations are starting?"

"No, no, you don't understand." Karuna cried, "They won't keep me here. If I go I will never come back."

I took her cold limp hand in mine and sat in silence. Yes, I

too was suffering but not like Karuna. My love was lacking in the wild passion that hurls itself rebelliously against impediments.

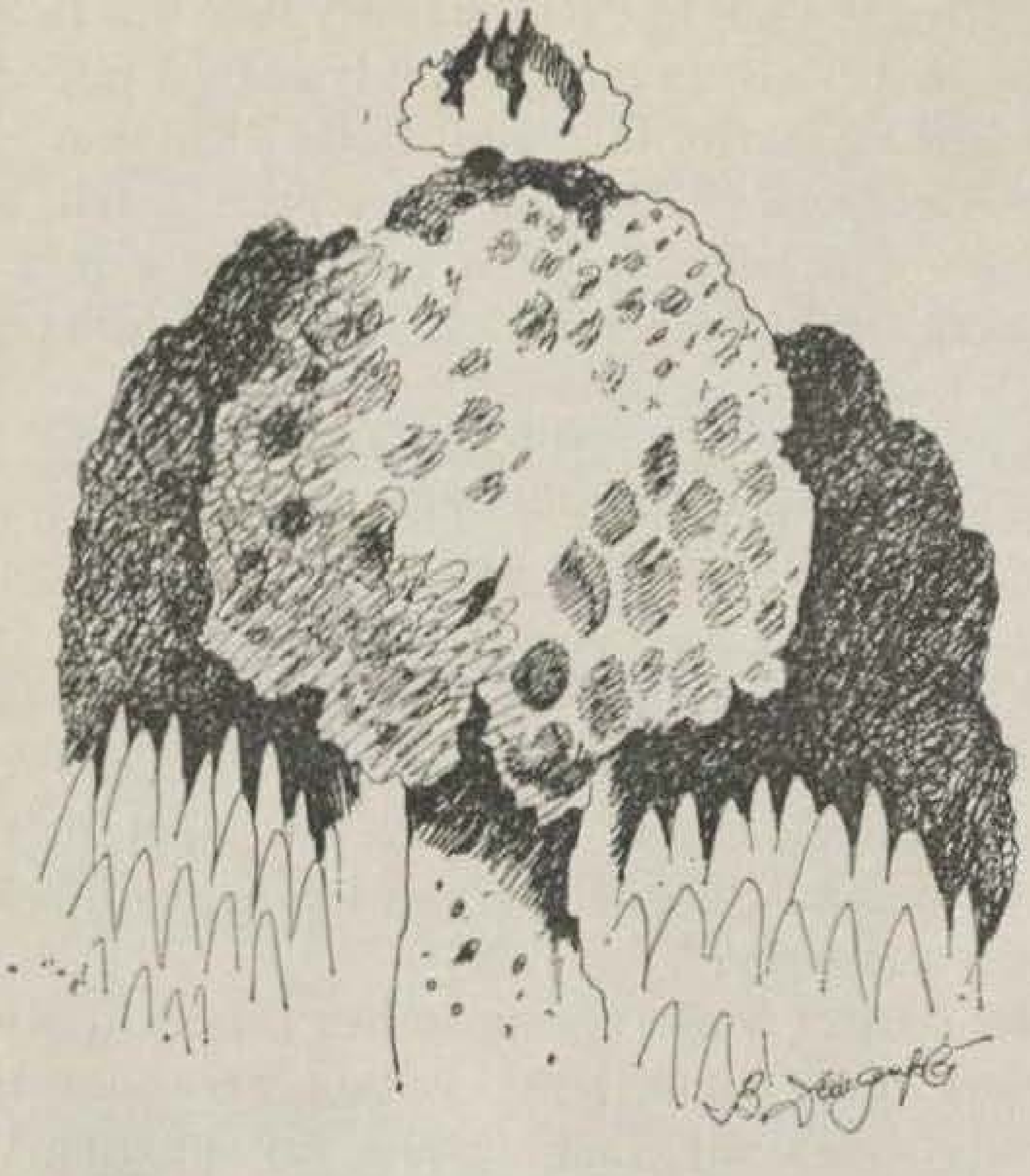
Karuna lifted a tearful face and said, "I'm not going. I won't go. Why should I?" I did not reply. I felt a sense of incompatibility with her. I knew her rebellion would be futile. I tried to make light of the situation: "Perhaps what you think is not true," I said.

"No, no" cried Karuna, "I know they will take me away and keep me under lock and key. They believe that it is the best medicine for girls like me." Karuna smiled bitterly, "I told them I was going to college and came away to you. I did not want to come to the hotel. But what else could I have done? You do not visit Aunty's house anymore. Besides I could not have spoken so freely there." Karuna was quiet for a moment. Suddenly she became insistent, "Can't we do anything? Will you let them take me away?"

With what sweet words and promises I soothed Karuna and left her at her aunt's house that evening need not be related here. Suffice it to say that despite my suffering I could do nothing. Karuna was taken to her uncle's house in Patna and subsequently married off. It was not that the news gave me no pain. But now, on maturer analysis, I realise that the misery of the days that followed stemmed from an awareness of Karuna's sufferings. What it is to have loved and lost I sensed through Karuna's fate—not my own. That a measure of egotism was mixed with such sentiments went completely unrecognised by me. Even when Karuna's image gradually grew dim, somewhere deep down there was a faith that *she* would never forget me. When that faith was dealt a severe blow I was aware of a strange sensation—one hitherto unknown to me.

When Karuna came to my room again she would have, had she cared to, noticed a subtle change in my manner. She picked up the plates and said, "You have eaten nothing."

Putting the last touches to my toilette I turned to her, "Formality breeds it own kind Karuna. Had I cleaned out the



plates you would have thought me famine-stricken."

"Oh! You are harping on what I said," Karuna sounded offended.

"I have an incurable weakness for harping on the past," I made my voice deep and emotional.

Karuna had turned away. I could not see her face. But when she replied her voice was light, "You mean you have cured your other weaknesses. Surely you are not going out so early?"

"Yes, I must enquire after the car."

"When it is ready my husband will inform you. He has asked you to wait till he comes."

"So I must sit and chat with you till then?" I tried to smile.

"Why not?" Karuna smiled too.

My voice changed, "You say this so easily Karuna."

"What is so difficult?" Karuna's face was both smiling and bewildered.

"Is it not difficult? Are you being true to your heart? Are you not afraid of yourself? I am."

"I think you're crazy." Karuna left the room with a smile, leaving me quite embarrassed. She didn't come back for a long time. A bitterness welled up in my breast as I paced to and fro. I don't know if it was against Karuna or against myself. What a mockery of fate this was. Why did I have to meet her again?

I had been in the middle of a motoring holiday when my car broke down suddenly last night. I was grateful that it had happened in a town and not in the jungles through which I had passed. Yet, to be stranded at night in a strange place is not a happy experience. After wandering for hours in a tonga in search of a hotel or dak bungalow I came back to the mechanic's shop where I had left my car. It was there that I met Bimal Babu. Seeing a fellow Bengali in distress he insisted on taking me home. I may have protested a little but to no avail.

Bimal Babu's house was situated at the far end of the town. When we reached there we found the house dark and silent. Bimal Babu explained as he knocked, "The servants must be asleep. I was not supposed to have come back tonight." After a while a lady came, lantern in hand, and opening the door said in a sleepy voice, "I was asleep. You said you weren't coming tonight." Bimal Babu smiled and said, "I was fated to do a good deed tonight. But for me this gentleman would have been stranded in a strange town." The lady stopped abruptly in the act of moving away and stood scrutinizing me. Bimal Babu was still talking: "Wake up the servants and ask them to make a bed in the outer room. The gentleman might find it a little uncomfortable."

"So what if he is a little uncomfortable. After all he is among strangers," Karuna laughed.

Bimal Babu looked at us both and asked his wife: "Do you know him?"

"A little."

"How extraordinary!"

"Why? I have been married to you for three years. The twenty before that were not passed in solitary confinement."

Bimal Babu laughed and said, "Give the gentleman a sample of our matrimonial felicity by all means but don't keep him out in the cold."

I felt it was time I said something, "I am a businessman Bimal Babu. I don't trust samples."

Karuna's manner had given me a jolt.

Karuna came after a long time. She had changed her clothes. Anticipating my question she said, "I have to go out. Would you like to come?" I picked up my shawl: "Command me," I said smiling, "Where do we go?"

"Shopping."

"Shopping?" I was surprised.

"I do a lot of the shopping myself. When my husband is away I have to."

"But Bimal Babu is here."

"Oh! I forgot to tell you. He has sent word that he can't come today. He has been held up."

Karuna had said this quite calmly. But I stopped short, "Then—"

"Then what?" Karuna interrupted, "Are you afraid that with Bimal Babu away you will not be looked after?"

"It isn't that Karuna," my voice was deep and quiet, "I'm thinking—"

"If you start thinking in the middle of the road I'll have to go on by myself."

I walked on with her. The road was rather deserted. A few houses were scattered here and there but most of them were empty. After walking for sometime I couldn't help asking her, "Will Bimal Babu be returning tonight?"

"Probably not. He may have to stay away for three or four days."

We walked on in silence. Karuna glanced at my face several times. "What are you thinking of so seriously?" she

asked at last.

"Perhaps I ought to go back tonight."

"But your car will not be repaired by then."

"The garage can send it straight to Calcutta. I'll go by train."

"Why are you in such a hurry? What are you afraid of?"

I stopped in the middle of the road. "I'm afraid of myself," I said.

Karuna laughed quite loudly: "So what?" she said, "That won't harm anyone!"

I could not bear that laugh. On an impulse I took her hand in mine and asked in a trembling voice, "Supposing *you* are harmed Karuna?"

Karuna did not draw her hand away. But she shattered my emotions with a mocking laugh: "How can that be?" she said, "I'm not afraid of myself."

I let go of her hand and said, "This confidence may not last. Such a wave may come into your life that can shatter your anchor and toss you in mid-ocean."

The same mocking smile appeared on Karuna's face: "Who knows?" she said, "I have not been put to the test."

I do not know what I would have replied to this. Fortunately for me there was no need to, for we had reached the heart of the town.

In the morning, when she was dressed for going out, I had seen one face of Karuna. At mid-day, when she sat fanning me while I ate an elaborate meal, I saw another. The wide red border of her sari was partially drawn over her head over the thick wet hair streaming down her back. I had never seen her looking so beautiful! Waving the fan she smiled, "What is it? Have you not seen me before?"

"I really feel I haven't."

"That may be" she smiled a strange smile, "Tell me, what did you think of my going out shopping alone?"

"I felt that you were a fresh discovery."

"Really? But don't forget to give poor Columbus his due."

"Someone may have a claim prior to Columbus."

"Someone may but he has no document to prove it," she laughed uproariously at her own joke. I ate for sometime in silence and then remarked, "Not everyone values a document. It is only a piece of paper that can be burned to ashes." This time Karuna did not smile. She searched my face for a long time, then rose to her feet with an abrupt movement: "I'll fetch the sweet" she said.

However, the sweet when it came was brought by the cook—not by Karuna. But she came to my room after a while and handing me a cone of betel leaf said suddenly, "So you are leaving tonight."

I stared at her. Did I see or was I only imagining a restless flicker in her eyes? "So be it," I said, "I'll go."

"What do you mean? You sound as though I am sending you away. I asked you to stay but you insisted on going." There was an edge to her voice that could not be mistaken.

I smiled, "I'm not blaming you. I really have to go Karuna."

A little shamfaced, Karuna tried to smile: "I knew that," she said, "as if you could go on staying in a hole like this. There's a train this evening at six thirty—the only one today. Don't forget."

There was no need for me to remember. Long before the due time Karuna had had my things packed, sent word to the garage and ordered a tonga to take me to the station. The journey to the station would take only fifteen minutes but Karuna made me leave an hour earlier. All this time neither of us had spoken. Just as I was getting into the tonga she came close to me and said, "I don't know what you are thinking of me. Perhaps that I'm trying to get rid of you."

"That thought is my sole consolation."

Karuna laughed, "When so little can console you you don't deserve anything better." The tonga started moving away and the creaking of its wheels drowned her laughter.

The story should have ended here but it did not. I reached the station with plenty of time to spare. Keeping my things in the waiting room I wandered aimlessly about. Finally I came and stood near a book stall wondering what to buy. Suddenly my eyes fell on a form standing next to me.

"Karuna! You?" I cried startled.

She smiled wanely, "I—just came."

In the faint light of the station lamp Karuna's face looked pale and drawn. Moving away from the stall I said, "I don't quite understand. What is it?"

Karuna smiled again and said in a sombre voice, "I've burned the document."

For some time I stood dazed and uncomprehending. Then I burst out.

"What are you saying Karuna?"

"Am I saying something extraordinary? Cannot a wave powerful enough to shatter the anchor come into my life?" Karuna's voice was heavy with unshed tears. She came close and whispered against my chest: "Can't you take me away? Can't you? Why don't you speak?"

Utterly bewildered I stuttered—"I. . . you. . . take you away?"

"Don't worry about where. Anywhere. Only take me with you."

I was struck dumb. A terrible panic seized me.

"You will suffer pain and humiliation, I know. But I too have abandoned all pride, all shame only to share that suffering with you." Karuna was looking at me with pleading eyes. What could I do? What could I say? It was I who was responsible for what had happened. Like a fool I had opened the flood gates of her dammed up emotions. How was I to turn back the flood that threatened to sweep me off my feet?

"There is something that you have not considered," I said in a voice that did not even fool me. "Do you have the power to fight the storm that will inevitably come? Will not years of struggling against it render us hateful to one another?"

Karuna was still looking at me with a fixed gaze. Gradually her face changed. A twisted smile had appeared on it. She said in a voice that was completely transformed, "Thank you for your advice It came in the nick of time. I was on the point of unhooking my anchor." She laughed out aloud. I stared at her. Was all this a pretence? Was her intention only to seek out my vulnerable spot and make a mockery of it?

Karuna said amicably, "Go, your train is about to leave. My train is also due."

"Your train?"

"Aunty is coming from Calcutta. They don't know the house so I thought I would come to meet them. Are you disappointed to hear that?"

Not another word was said. I started climbing the over-bridge to the next platform where my train stood. I looked back once and saw Karuna bending over the books in the stall. Had she really come to take her aunt home? I will never know.

Tr. from Bengali by ARUNA CHAKRAVARTI

Cold Waves

KISHORI CHARAN DAS

YOU can't have a glimpse of the sea from within the house, from any angle whatsoever. But you are bound to hear the constant roar of the waves. And that is what irritates Kartick Babu, more so when there is no other sound now to claim his attention in this house. There is no mother-of-Rangia, the maid-servant who would love to have a verbal showdown with the manservant Raghua at the earliest opportunity. Mother-of-Rangia is dead. Raghua is now attached to the elder son, moving around the world on some export-import business. No furious cackle of hens chased by a mischievous boy. For that boy, the younger son, is now a cardiologist sitting pretty at Calcutta. No monkeys chattering on the guava tree. (Even the damned monkeys are dead or what?) And there is no Sarita. The one who had induced me to buy this house. Had fed me on hopes of a retired life, the two of us together, by the side of the sea, listening to the song of the waves. Song, my foot! She made it fast to the upper regions. While I am left listening to this—the stupid sound that goes on and on. . .

The young men of today are such oddballs, really. Our Ramu, a strapping lad of twenty—does he ever come out of his den? Reading comics and ogling at the semi-nude pictures of girls in film magazines is all that occupies him on a vacation. And when I ask him to do something, he just smiles sheepishly

and says—I am getting bored! But, pray tell me, why? Couldn't you talk about things with your grandpa? About the wide world you have travelled with your father, the many places you have seen, strange sights and sounds, and what have you? You could also ask your grandpa to take you somewhere in this pilgrim town, that I know so well. At least for a stroll on the beach, where we can do better than merely listen to the waves, and may as well have some fun with them. You could perhaps get inside them and then come out on top, and laugh and play, while I do the clapping. But no, you would do nothing of the sort. For you are a sissy! mama's boy!

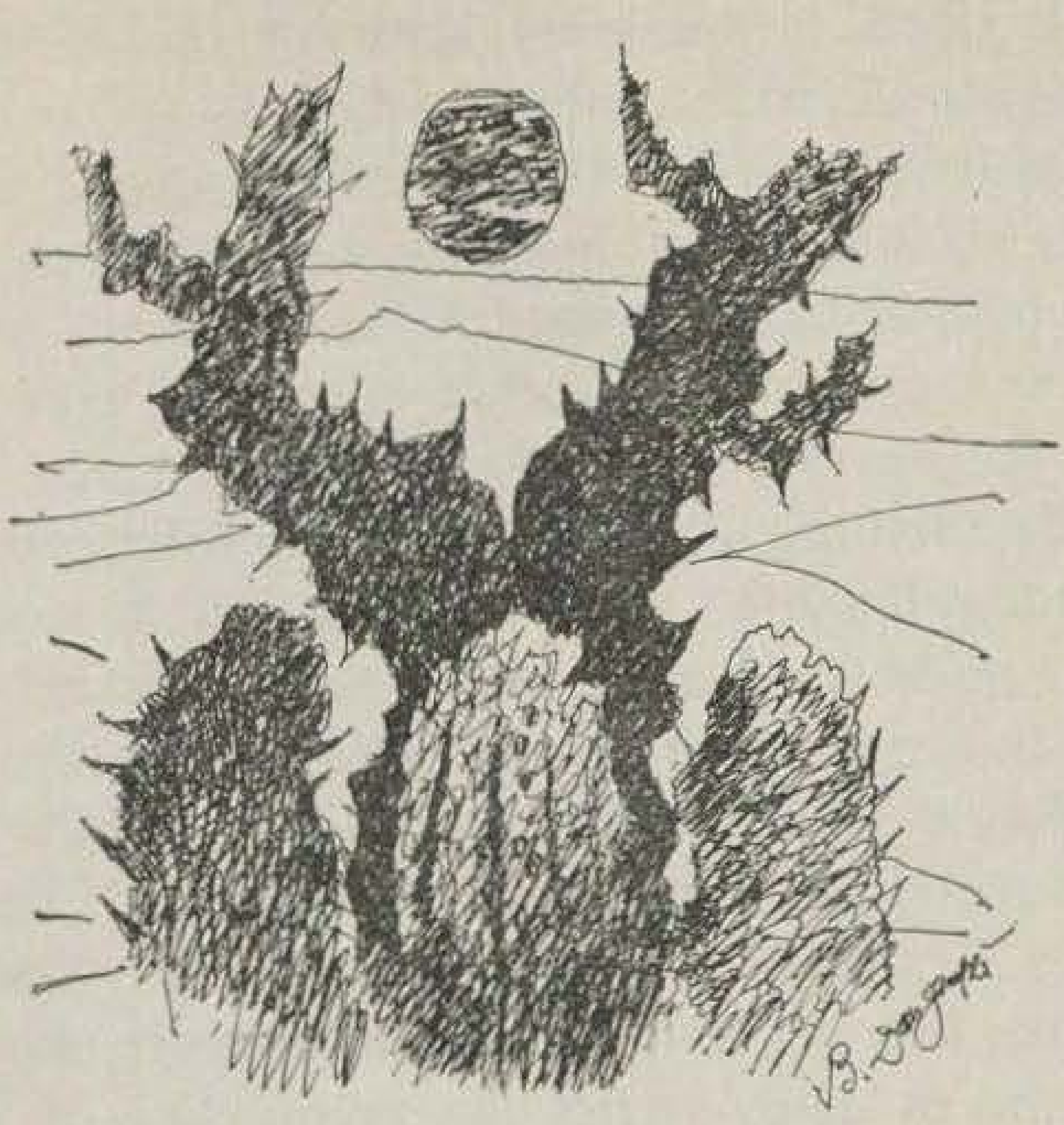
But Kartick Babu was not inclined to remove himself from his thoughts or the easy-chair. As if he had laid himself knowingly on the block. And wanted to tell them waves—Look, you may do your worst, I couldn't care less. I know you will stop someday, when I won't be there. So?

Much later he decided that he must move out, for he was not an invalid. Far from it. Nor had he any of those typical ailments of old age—diabetes, hypertension, gout, or whatever. And he was not merely fit in the physical sense. His mind was alert as ever. Wiser too, cured as it was of all the mushy sentiment that affects youth and middle age. So he was not troubled any more over the wrongs committed by his family. Or by the leaders of our country, for that matter. He was obliged only to observe and smile it away. . .

On moving out he could hear snatches of a humming tune from within the closed doors of Ramu's room. And he spoke to him inwardly—My dear fellow! Couldn't you clear your throat and sing a song like normal people? I mean, if you are really enjoying yourself.

Kartick Babu found the sky a little too gray, and the air a little too damp, when he stepped out of his house. Was the climate of Puri like this when I bought the house?—he wondered. He felt a little shivering too. But he didn't admit to the need of a shawl or something to wrap around his body.

He had no distinct plans of going anywhere. Told himself



that walking on and on with firm steps was all that mattered. However, in a moment he thought he might as well go to the dirty-yellow house a few paces away. The house was rented by an old man, father to a numerous brood, whom he had met at the beach. . . The fellow had tried to fraternize with me, as if I was no less old, and hence his natural ally (in fact I am much older, but that does not show) and we could exchange information on our respective flatulence, coughs and colds and what you will. Fool! I would show him that the years don't make you old, but how you feel about yourself.

But he had hardly expected such overwhelming hospitality at the dirty-yellow house. Sadanand Babu, the head of the family, was effusive with his words and gestures of welcome, short of an embrace, and launched on a long recital of the reasons for which he had chosen Puri for his initial stay after retirement Pity, his wife was not improving fast enough in her health, but his children, many of them now on vacation, were happy to be here. And he won't be feeling lonely any more, now that God had granted him such a good neighbour. Etc. Kartick Babu could not possibly respond to his ingratiating manners,

which he ascribed to the lowly status of the host, that of a retired revenue assistant. But he did not feel it necessary to tell him that he was a retired Head of the Department. And he could not ignore the atmosphere he was presented with—of joy unbounded. The way the boys were laughing and chattering and chasing each other round the ramshackle sofa. Above all, the way a girl, hardly out of her teens, was lording above it all. Smiling like a queen and breaking out suddenly into a rippling laughter, and then changing over to a demure and serious pose for asking a question such as—"Papa, do waves grow bigger when the tide comes and smaller when it leaves?" As if she was indeed a queen and could choose and change her moods at will! Kartick Babu could not but watch her bemusedly and comment to himself—here was another sample of the new generation, lovable of sorts, but incredibly foolish. And suddenly he felt like pulling her to his side and then treat her to a tiny little slap. . . or may be a quickie kiss on her rounded cheeks. . .

On his way back home Kartick Babu felt that it was a shame, a crying shame that Ramu was different. Couldn't he go over and be friends with these people? At least the girl would have welcomed some company and fun.

Kartick Babu did an unusual piece of work that afternoon. He delved deep into the old papers of his young days lying in rusted steel trunks in the "storage room" and unearthed a stamp album. And he brought it almost furtively to his bed-room for a long leisurely look. . .Ah! they are all here. Russia of the Czars, Germany before Hitler, and Latvia and Tanganyka, states that you do not find on the map any more. My know-all ones did not show any interest in this precious collection. But there would be other children. For sure she would understand and welcome it, that wide-eyed girl.

The wide-eyed girl who belonged to the dirty-yellow house did more than welcome the gift. She did such a joyous little dance that made Kartick Babu wonder if this was what they meant by bubbling youth, and he had missed it somehow.

Which made him keep up the visits to his neighbour. And delve deeper and for longer hours into the trunks of the storage room for similar treasures. . .How about this one, the brass snuff-box shaped like a frog ? Or should I bring out that toy-hookah ? She may not have seen anything like it in today's homes. Or may be that marble elephant. . .Finally he settled for one, to start with, out of mischief (so he thought)—a childish drawing of palm trees and houses and sunset presented to him many years ago by Ramu. He imagined that Ramu and that girl would fight over it someday, when he saw it in her hands. And such fights were known to generate other feelings. Kartick Babu chuckled over the possibility, even as he told himself that it was an idle thought, for his Ramu was totally useless.

Anyway he was glad to notice that this one made her chuckle too. In fact all the gifts he plied her with on his successive visits were not merely accepted with thanks, but received with evident pleasure, variously displayed. Kartick Babu marvelled every time at her historionic talents. And he thought it would be wrong to dismiss her questions as trite. Look at the questions she has been asking me about the stamps—Uncle, why should there be just five stars in the stamps, not more nor less? Which made us talk about political history and then about the wonders of the solar system. Similarly her question about Kangaroos. Do the whites eat them too? She asked. Shouldn't they worship them as special animals, like our holy cows? That made us talk about religion, superstition, social ecology, and what have you. And how intently would she keep listening to me, as if I was her class teacher!

However Kartick Babu couldn't go there too often, as he would have wished. Because the return visits from Sadanand Babu were not adequate. After all, there is a certain protocol among neighbours, he reasoned, even if one ignores the difference in status. Of course the girl has been coming here once in a while and has been asking all sorts of funny questions.

And she has been telling me that her mother is not too well. So I might as well drop in for a minute. But why can't Ramu act normal and visit them ?. . .The debate would have continued thus, but not perhaps for long, when it was rudely terminated on one sultry evening by the seaside.

He was at his usual spot, a little removed from the BNR hotel, fairly secluded for serious thought. There were no hawkers here, no empty chatter of tourists, and no ungainly sight of old people behaving like kids. Yes, it got a little too cold and lonely over here when the shadows lengthened, but he sought to ignore it. So he was taken somewhat by surprise, when he saw two young people in the distance sitting side by side, and watching the waves, like as if they were lovers and wanted no less to escape from the crowd. It was not an unpleasant surprise, for he was happy to note that there was some romance yet, in the present day world of Philistines.

Till he could see them at close range, when they were walking back. The faces were not clearly visible, but the gestures were familiar. Jeans over a thin pair of legs. . .the slouch. . .and then the way the girl laughed, like as if she was ringing a bell or something.

There could be no mistake now. It was Ramu. And the girl was no other than Malini, the girl from the dirty-yellow house !

Kartick Babu laughed. The silly fools! Why couldn't you be frank and open about it? Peeping in at odd hours to ask questions about stamps. Stamps indeed! And that Ramu telling me that there was no point in going right now to Delhi to attend coaching classes for the competitive exams, as one must do some private studies first. But how could I be taken in by such sham ? Am I getting senile or what? Nonsense! Kartick Babu told himself that he was unused to the devious ways of the young people of today, that's why.

But he was not getting angry, he wished to assure the two of them. . .I am hurt, yes, because you did not play fair with me. But I am not going to stand in the way of your happiness.

I am not that kind of man.

He withdrew himself completely from the dirty-yellow house. Not from the beach though. I don't want to encourage that old man, he said, in his game of marrying his daughter into my family. But there is no reason why I should not be myself.

So he found them almost every evening at the beach. And pitied them. For he had a feeling, he felt it in his bones, that it won't last. There was a false note somewhere in the improbable romance. Notwithstanding the full-throated songs sung by Ramu these days. And the increasingly pert (and stupider) questions asked by the girl on her rare visits to his study room.

He missed seeing them for quite a few days on the beach. He did not think they had seen him too and were avoiding him. For he had been careful enough to keep himself at a sufficient distance since that evening—the shadows and silhouettes were enough for his understanding. So what could have happened ? He was beginning to feel that his premonitions were coming true.

He was confirmed in his feelings when Sadanand Babu came to inform him regretfully, that he was leaving the place with his entire brood for urgent family reasons. Day after tomorrow.

And then came that final evening, the next day, when Kartick Babu found Ramu all alone on the beach with his sorrows. There could be no doubt about the sorrows, the way he was throwing pebbles and things at the sea, getting up all of a sudden and pacing up and down the stretch, etc.—the typical gestures of a heart-broken (or may be jilted) lover.

His heart reached out to him. For once he felt a strangely satisfying communion with his grandson. He wanted to tell him that all these evenings, of the young and old alike, carry the same sadness and one has to get over them. For life has to be lived. And Malini was after all, not the most desirable girl left in the world. . .lively she may be, but terribly shallow, if you ask me. . .

He was determined to break all barriers and tell him tonight about these things and more, concerning life and love.

But he was totally confused (before it hit him) to hear the first words from Ramu when he reached home—

"Grandpa, do you have the stamps of Honduras with you ? They are supposed to be among the most colourful, no ?"

Kartick Babu looked at the face of his grandson. It was so guileless. But not so the waves. He could see them better, the shameless ones, grinning at him.

Amalya

NIRMAL VERMA

Gently placing my hand over his shoulder I led him up the stairs of the basement. He was still shivering with cold and took his trembling hand to his face as if he was trying to efface the vestiges of sleep from his forehead down to his chin.

"Son-of-a-bitch !" he said.

"Not so loud. He may be listening." I dragged him to the door of the basement. Both of us lingered at the threshold for a while. Who would care to stir out in such a severe cold?

We heard the girl's laughter behind the door—loud, soft and clear.

I pushed open the door. Outside, the darkness of an early night was spread around. Under the pale light of lamp-posts our shadows were wavering like thieves.

"Shameless! Stupid !" he cried.

I did not stop him from speaking. Now there was no one around within hearing range.

We stopped after walking some distance. Turning back we gazed at the building in which our basement was situated—below the road, hidden in the dark, with beds arranged in tiers, like beds in hospital wards.

After wandering aimlessly in the city all day long we would return to the basement in the evening where an acrid smell would assail us. Whether it was the smell of stale air

or of our unwashed, damp beds, it was difficult to say. We had long since given up hazarding a guess about it. We feared that it could as well as be the smell of dead rats. The fear was there all right, but we never expressed it in so many words.

Every morning we would go to the Ministry's office and wait there. They had told us that as soon as our papers were ready we would be sent to another city. But we were never told which city. We were not worried over it though. We knew it would be like any other city, as new and strange as this one.

We would wait in the office for long hours. In those days waiting like this did not jar on us as we had a lot of time on our hands. Besides, while cooling our heels in that office we were spared of the foul smell of the basement and its damp cold. Even otherwise it was preferable to wait within the four walls of a familiar office than slog around unfamiliar city streets.

"Don't you like it here?" a middle-aged woman who worked in that office would put us this question almost every day. She was a sympathetic, kindly woman and felt bad when she saw us wasting our time in the office. She thought we could spend it in more pleasant and worthwhile ways. In the beginning, she had even given us complimentary theatre passes for an evening at the opera on behalf of the Ministry. She thought this way we would not feel lonely in the evenings. But when she found that we just tucked the passes in our pockets without making use of them she felt greatly disappointed. "It is only a matter of a few days more," she would say giving us a dispairing look. We knew it was a hint for us to leave. We would thank her, have a formal handshake and depart.

We never cared to find out who among us went where during the course of the day. But the one who arrived first in the evening would invariably wait for the others. It was only the Brazilian who rarely went out and stayed in the basement most of the time. When I returned in the evening I would

find him lying in his bed. His guitar would be resting in a chair and his mother's photograph, as usual, planted at the table. He had shown me the photograph on the very first day of his arrival. It had put me in a quandary. If it was a wife's or sweet-heart's photograph one could without hesitation say that she looked so charming or beautiful. But what kind of comment could one make about a mother even if she was beautiful, as was the case with the Brazilian's mother. Had he not told me that it was his mother I could have been unwitting with my remarks. Anticipating some such thing he had perhaps thought it discreet to tell me about her in advance.

"How is the weather outside?" He would ask me still lying in his bed.

"Like yesterday," I would reply.

"Today it was very chilly here," he would tell me.

"We had a short spell of sunshine though the cold was as severe as yesterday."

We would talk in this manner, reeling out one sentence after another as are given in phrase-books meant for foreign tourists. We also conveyed our meanings by gestures. But we would soon get bored. We had not developed that sense of intimacy which alone could fill the vacuum between our lingo and our gestures. It needed patience and greater familiarity to cultivate that intimacy. And we were too submerged under the days' drudgery to make the effort.

Sometimes it happens that two persons cannot talk with complete abandon unless a third person is also present in their midst. We were also faced with some such situation. Till that Arab arrived we would keep lying tongueless in our beds.

The Arab would generally come late and that lent him some distinction. We were curious to know what he did in that unknown city till so late in the night. No doubt he was conscious of this singularity of his personality and was quite vain about it Coming into the basement, he would remove his over-coat with exaggerated care, after which he would remove his

jacket followed by his trousers and underwear as if we were not there. This done, he would go and stand before the mirror and start grooming his curly hair with his comb. He would give us an unconcerned look as if we did not exist at all, as if he was not sharing the same basement which we did.

"Have you eaten ?" he would ask.

"No." We could not admit to ourselves that we had been waiting for him.

He would open his suitcase to take out a change of clothes. It was a beautiful leather suitcase of yellow colour. It must have been quite heavy even now. On the first day of his arrival the Brazilian and myself had to help him in lugging it down the stairs. At night he had opened his suitcase before going to sleep while we had stood by as curious lookers-on. First he had taken out two dinner suits and half a dozen nylon shirts followed by ties of variegated colours, handkerchiefs and underwears. We watched them in fascination. Suddenly he stopped and gave us a mystifying look. "Want to see something more?" He smiled like a conjurer looking at the spectators before opening his pandora's box.

He took out a couple of silk scarves, ladies nylon stockings, a string of pearls and bracelets.

"Forty dollars," he said.

"Forty dollars?" the Brazilian's eyes opened wide in surprise.

"One can't get these things over here," the Arab said.

"Are you going to sell them?"

"I have not come here to open a shop." The Arab gave us a contemptuous look. "How long have you been here?" His tone was tinged with derision.

"Today it is my fifth day," the Brazilian spread out his five fingers in the air. Both of us had come together but I did not know that he had been counting the days so assiduously.

The Arab nodded his head and proceeded to close his suitcase. We had fallen in his eyes.

The restaurant was not far from our basement. But we had

to walk through dark lanes to reach it and the distance would seem to be unending.

The street was flanked by tall, decripit buildings on both sides. Sometimes a gap intervened with piles of rubble in front reminding us of the last War in which a large number of houses were destroyed. In moonlit nights we would discover lot of strange things in these pyramids of rubble—children's dolls, shaving brushes, fifteen or sixteen years old newspapers. The Brazilian would often rummage through the rubble for such things and bring them back with him to the basement. The Arab and myself would find this habit of his laughable even though our own eyes were alert enough to grab any good find. It was an ancient city and in moonlit nights we had an eerie feeling that there must be something mysterious lying embedded under every stone and under every crumbling wall. We had only to extend our hands to get hold of the thing; it was just waiting for us to be picked up.

One night the Arab fished out something from the rubble which almost bowled us over—a violin, a complete violin and a genuine one! It was lying embedded in the crumbling wall of a house. The Arab examined it by turning it from side to side. "Looks like it belonged to some Jew," he remarked at last.

"How do you know?" the Brazilian asked.

"Who else could it belong?" the Arab said.

The Brazilian thought it futile to refute the Arab's seemingly irrefutable statement. But what the Arab did next roused our ire against him. The Arab hid the violin in the same place where he had discovered it. "If you don't require it, give it to me," the Brazilian said. "I'll take it home."

"No, you're not taking it anywhere," the Arab said in a decisive voice.

I don't have much interest in music but I was not prepared to see the violin abandoned in such a facile manner. Sensing our displeasure, the Arab said, "One should not pick up a deadman's things even if they belong to a Jew."

"How do you know he is dead?" I asked him.

"Even if he is alive we should not touch his things," the Arab said. "He may turn up any moment to retrieve his things."

At that time we did not take kindly to his remark. But when we looked at the crumbling and broken walls drenched in moonlight we felt a sense of relief : the violin had gone back to where it belonged. Now nobody could take it away.

We would stay in the restaurant till midnight. I and the Arab would drink in moderation but the Brazilian did not even touch the liquor. Sometimes we had tried to force it on him. But after drinking half a glass of beer he had vomitted double the quantity right on the table. After that we did not insist upon him to drink. When we were merry and drank in excess of what we normally should, the Brazilian would sit there scowling at us, without wasting a word on us. We would feel uncomfortable and come out of the restaurant.

On coming out we would start talking glibly. We felt we were not so lonely as we thought ourselves to be back in the basement. On our way back from the restaurant we would come across couples standing at their doors whispering sweet-nothings to each other. The Arab would whistle at them. They would turn back to look and laugh. Sometimes we almost brushed past them but it did not even make them conscious of our presence. "Don't they feel the cold?" the Brazilian would ask.

"Of course, they feel the cold," the Arab would say. "That's why they are clinging to each other."

We could see the girls' white frocks etched against the night's darkness and a smell would ooze from them which had no relation with the past or the future. It was a kind of smell which floats in the air of ancient cities, tingling our nerves.

Coming back to the basement we would quietly slip into our beds. Except for the scurrying of rats everything was quiet. Only once I had heard a soft murmur from the other bed and I had sat up flustered. The Brazilian had lighted a candle in

front of his mother's photograph. His eyes were closed and his lips were moving. Perhaps he was praying before going to sleep. I turned on my side and went to sleep. After a while the candle went out but a gray darkness kept crawling in the basement.

Through our skylight we could see the feet of the passers-by on the road above upto their knees. Long legs and short legs, high-heeled sandals, tiny feet like a puppet's. We could not see their faces, of course. But we could imagine their visages from the sizes of their feet. Till I fell asleep I would keep looking at the Theatre of the Road from my bed.

That night we kept waiting for the Arab's return till very late hours. He habitually kept late hours but he never came back so late. While going out we had stuck a chit on the basement door telling him that we were at the restaurant. But when we returned the chit was still intact.

"I don't know where he is gone," the Brazilian said in an anxious voice.

"He has many friends here," I said. "He might have stayed back for the night with one of them."

We were really missing the Arab. When he was with us he would start on some topic or the other, generally about what he had done during the day, about his experiences, some true, others concocted. Of the three of us the Arab was the most knowing and experienced. Although he had the least interest in such things as the museum, the old cathedrals and churches, he was partial to the so-called good life. He would often regale us with his 'gay' experiences of night clubs, dancing halls and the like.

That night I could not sleep for a long time although I made a pretence of sleep to enable the Brazilian to start his prayers in peace. The basement seemed to be lying in a hush. The only sound was the scurrying of rats behind the wall papers.

"Are you sleeping ?" The Brazilian's voice came through the darkness. I thought he was testing me. I lay still, holding

my breath.

"Listen," this time his voice struck a mildly anxious note and I could not pretend sleep. "What's the matter?" I asked turning on my side.

"Do you have any friends here ?" he asked.

"No," I replied.

"Not even one ?"

"No, not one."

We lay still for a while in the darkness.

"Why, what's the matter?" I asked him.

"No, its nothing." That note of anxiety was missing from his voice. He sounded so composed and calm.

Turning on my side I lay there facing the wall. The light of the lamp-posts filtering through the skylight palely fell on our boxes and beds. When someone passed along the road his shadow fell like a cinema slide on the opposite wall. For a long time we lay there shivering in the cold. In those nights I often lay wondering which was more bearable—hunger or cold ? Of course, there was no point in speculating over such matters. We had no chance to chose between the two. We had to contend against both.

Last night also I had heard that pattering sound. When I heard it today, I thought the Brazilian had got up and gone to ease himself. The toilet was on the first floor and we had to climb the stairs all the way to reach there. But after a while when I again heard the same tapping I became suspicious. In the dark I groped my way to the Brazilian's bed and felt his bed. Lying on his stomach he was deep in his slumbers. For a moment I thought it could be Monika, tip-toing on her paws. Monika was our cat who scratched on our door every night to gain entry into the basement after meeting her lover. She kept scratching till one of us opened the door and lay her down under a bed.

Groping my way through the dark I flung open the door. A hand fell over my shoulder, gripping it tightly. "Don't be afraid. Its me."

"You!"

"I've been banging on the door for the past half hour."

In his hot, intoxicated breath the Arab's words fluttered like drying clothes.

"We thought you would not turn up now that it is so late."

I was now wide awake. The basement door was half-ajar and the outside wind had blown away my remaining sleep.

"Come in," I said.

But he just stood there holding my shoulder.

"Where's that Brazilian ?" he at last asked.

"He is sleeping."

"Listen," he said patting my shoulder. "You'll have to go out for sometime."

"Outside? What do you mean?" I gave him a quizzical look.

"There's a girl with me," he said.

So here is something happening after all, I said to myself. The last five days had been so eventless.

"She is standing outside," the Arab said in a low voice. "I would like you to change your clothes before she comes in."

I went in and sat down on my bed, he following me close on my heels. The basement door was ajar. "She's standing out in the cold," he said.

"I know," I said without getting up from my bed.

"She met me at a night club. Later I invited her to come with me and she agreed."

"But what about him ?" I pointed towards the Brazilian.

"He will also have to go out with you," the Arab said impatiently.

"But he is sleeping."

"Can't you wake him up?"

I felt like wrapping my blanket round my body and go back to sleep. I did not mind going out in that severe cold but what jarred on me was the manner in which he was taking things for granted, particularly his sense of complacency about driving

us out so easily.

I kept sitting on my bed stock-still.

"I'm not asking you to go out on the road," the Arab drew closer to me. "If you so desire, you may close the door and stay in the vestibule."

"She is standing out in the cold," I said.

"What do you mean?" he said.

I started changing my clothes. He helped me in locating my things. Perhaps he had never before taken so much trouble in helping a person to dress. Sometimes I misplaced my things out of sheer cussedness but I soon got bored with this game, with the darkness, with his breathing over my shoulders.

I was going to move out when he held me back by holding my hand. "Are you leaving him here?" he asked pointing towards the Brazilian who was fast asleep ignorant of the drama being enacted in the basement.

"Let him sleep. He will know nothing."

For a while he stood there looking at me uncertainly, not able to decide how seriously he should take this suggestion of mine.

"I don't mind his presence so long as he is sleeping," he said at last. "But she may not be willing."

He had to make an effort to utter this sentence. He went to the other end of the basement and stood there with his back set against the wall. I had never seen such a strong and hefty man giving himself up to despair so easily. I walked up to the Brazilian's bed. A dim light filtering through the sky-light was falling on his mother's photograph. I gently shook his shoulder and before I could speak to him a rattling sound escaped his lips. His body was shaking.

I let go his shoulder and switched on my torch to enable him to see my face. He quickly composed himself and a faint smile flit across his face.

"So you were trying to scare me, eh?" he said.

"We shall have to go out for a while," I said. "Outside the

basement. Only for a short while."

His gaze travelled to the Arab who was now standing in the middle of the basement watching the proceedings.

"When did you come ?" the Brazilian asked cheerfully.

The Arab seemed to be at the end of his patience. He flung the Brazilian's coat on his bed. "For God's sake, please hurry up," he said. "I can't keep watching this circus the whole night."

"What circus ?" The Brazilian gave him a mystified look.

The door outside creaked. Then there was a gentle tap of feet as if someone was getting quite ill at ease outside.

"I think there is someone outside," the Brazilian said.

I held his hand and pulled him towards the door. In the darkness we could not see her clearly. But it was a girl all right standing over the threshold.

The Brazilian stopped in his tracks. "I refuse to go," he said. It was like the last straw on the camel's back, I thought to myself.

"Won't you go?" the Arab came up and stood behind him. He was breathing hard as if he had just finished a long race.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" the Brazilian turned to me. But before I could have a word with him, the Arab gently pushed him towards the door. This had caught the Brazilian unawares and his head struck against the wall. He felt his forehead with his hand like a child to see if it was bleeding. To his disappointment, it was dry.

The girl was still standing at the door watching us intently, I found the situation rather comical. We were quarrelling like children before that girl. Leaving the Brazilian behind, I came to the landing. The next moment he came running to me. "You can't leave me alone like this," he said panting.

"But I thought you wanted to stay back."

"Son-of-a-bitch !" he shrieked.

I dragged him to the basement door. For sometime we stood there peering into the darkness. It looked well-nigh impossible to go out in that severe cold of an early November

night. A fog was swirling against naked leafless trees and a thin mist had spread around us. The houses were stationary but if you looked at them steadily they seemed to be floating in the fog like small paperboats.

"Who was that girl?" the Brazilian asked hesitatingly.

"Could be any girl." I had started shivering. My hands and feet had turned numb with cold.

"Why has he sent us out ?"

I looked at him and kept quiet. Was he pretending or he really did not know? May be I was pretending to understand the situation just as he pretended to be ignorant of it. We were thus in a way quits.

"In a hurry I forgot to bring my gloves," he said

"If you are feeling so cold we can still go in," I said. I myself wanted to go back but was reluctant to take the initiative.

There was a sharp click. The Brazilian gave me a surprised look. "The Arab has bolted the door from inside," he said.

"We can stand near the stairs," I said. "It's not so cold there."

It seemed my suggestion had not appealed to him. Perhaps he was right in a way. The outside cold of the open street was anytime preferable to the darkness and the stale air under the staircase.

"I don't think any restaurant would be open at this time?" he said.

"At this late hour?" I said trying to give my words a touch of levity. But it seemed my effort misfired for I ended up by sounding miserable.

We came to the side-walk. The road was lying deserted. The eerie stillness of an unknown city is not like the silence of one's own city. The thought struck as something odd to me. But one is soundless, the other only silent. Silence has a familiar air about it. Before the world came into being there must have been a pervading stillness about it and when it would come to an end there would be silence. That was the only difference that

I could think of between the two.

"Do you know that girl?" the Brazilian asked me.

"No, I don't," I replied.

"Nor do I. I've never seen her before."

"The Arab had met her in a dancing club."

"How do you know?"

"So he had told me. You were sleeping at that time."

"If we inform the Ministry about it the Arab would be in great trouble," the Brazilian said. But there was no anger in his voice.

We stopped under a lamp-post. There were old houses on both sides of the street, their windows closed. Sometimes a light would come on in a house and we would see a shadow behind a curtain. We would keep looking at the shadow without batting an eyelid till the window merged into darkness.

"Have you ever come out so late at night?" the Brazilian asked me.

"Not in this city," I said giving him a close look.

"I never stayed out so late even in my own city," the Brazilian said. He was shivering from head to foot.

"You had no friends there?"

"Of course, I had. But not like this Arab." He hesitated for an instant and then added in a low whisper. "We don't entice girls like this."

"How do you know that the Arab has enticed her?"

"Didn't you notice how jittery she was looking?"

I looked at him. He must be around nineteen or twenty. Tall, fair, an incipient beard and a dreamy sadness in his eyes which one finds only in boys who have never touched a girl.

We turned back and stopped in front of our building. There was no sound inside and no light. Climbing down the stairs we stopped in front of the basement door. For sometime we stood there listening to the scurrying of rats in the darkness. Every moment we felt as if some slippery thing had slithered past our feet.

It was comparatively less cold here. But it was painful to

think that we were so close to our beds and yet could not get there.

"Won't you go in?" the Brazilian uttered the words as if I was preventing him from going in.

"She must still be inside," I said.

"If she stays here the whole night, shall we then keep standing out the whole night." He sounded peeved.

"No, it does not mean that by a long shot," I said in a reassuring tone. He refrained from knocking on the door and so did I.

After a while we heard a subdued noise in the basement and our feet moved towards the door of their own accord. The door latch clicked but the door still remained closed as before. I felt as if someone was standing behind the door, silent and expectant like us.

I thought we should retrace our steps. But I did not stir from where I was standing. Just to find out, the Brazilian gently pushed at the door and it flung open. We stood there as if transfixed. She was standing at the other side of the threshold and staring at us. She didn't give any impression of nerves. She was watching our discomfiture.

"Where's the toilet?" she asked in a low voice.

We stood there looking at her.

"Don't you people live here?"

The Brazilian nodded his head and I too. She had recognised us.

"Can you tell me where's the toilet?" she repeated her question.

"Upstairs." the Brazilian said.

"Upstairs?"

I pointed towards the stairs but it was quite dark and one couldn't make out anything.

"Is there no light over here?"

"There's light upstairs, but not in the stairs," I said.

The Brazilian lit his pocket torch and moved towards the stairs. It was for the first time that we were seeing the girl's face

clearly. Her bright hair were dishevelled and were falling over her forehead. It appeared she was coming straight from the bed. Her forehead was narrow and there were blue hollows under her eyes as if many sleepless nights had dissolved in those hollows. She glanced at us one by one. There was no fear in those eyes nor any sense of shame or embarrassment. Only a faint curiosity which appeared quite odd at that hour of the night.

"Please come with me," the Brazilian said. She looked at him and smiled. The Brazilian's face flushed and he quickly climbed up the stairs, flashing his torch. The girl followed him, her hips rippling like the flanks of a horse.

Coming into the basement. I sat down on my bed. After the outside cold, the cold within the basement felt pleasant. I fished out my packet of cigarettes from under the pillow. But my hand suddenly stopped. The Arab had turned on his side. I had completely forgotten about him.

"So you have returned ?" he said.

"Yes," I replied.

"May I have a cigarette?"

Going to his bed I handed him my packet of cigarettes.

"Is she gone?"

"She is gone to the toilet. She should be back any moment."

The Arab started smoking. I proceeded to take off my shoes.

"Was it cold outside?" he asked. In spite of the casualness of the question there was a trace of anxiety in his voice. I liked it.

"Not much," I said.

"I'm afraid she can't return to her hostel at this time of the night," he said.

"Does she live in a hostel?"

"That's what she told me. May be she told me a lie."

Without removing my clothes I lay down on my bed. He could as well ask us to go out again. There were only three beds in the basement. There were more cots but they were

without beds—like hospital beds which are left bare for sometime after a patient's death.

There was a blob of light on the wall which kept on getting bigger. Then I saw the Brazilian standing at the door. He came near my bed and murmured to me, "Her name is Amalya."

"How do you know?"

"I told her my name and she told me her's." He was breathing heavily.

"Amalya!" I was getting suspicious.

"She told me many more things but I could not follow her."

"What did she tell you?" I heard the Arab's voice in the dark.

The Brazilian gave a start. Like me he had also forgotten about the Arab's existence.

We heard a faint laugh at the door—a bright, cheerful laugh which seemed to have a separate existence from the darkness, cold and smell of the basement.

She blinked at the light of the torch. She was standing on the threshold, holding Monika in her lap, who used to scratch at the door with her paws every night. She was resting her head against Amalya's neck.

"She was lying in the stairs," she said apologetically.

Sitting in our beds we watched her steadily.

"May I bring the cat inside with me?"

The Arab growled. Was it at her or at the cat, we could not decide.

For a while we did't even know where she was standing. It had started raining and as we heard the patter of raindrops through the skylight it sounded as if someone was boring small holes in the dark.

"What's this noise?" the girl asked.

"It's only the rats," the Brazilian replied.

"Rats?" the voice sounded scared.

"They generally avoid the basement," I said.

"Oh!" she heaved a sigh of relief.

"Are you afraid of rats?" the Arab asked in a bantering tone.

"I've a cat," she said.

The Brazilian and I were pleased with her answer. How witty of her! She had made the Arab speechless.

The Brazilian took out a half-burnt candle from his table drawer. He used it very sparingly. Its burnt-down wax had collected at its base resembling a withered flower.

The candle threw a very dim light. It however did us one good turn. It drove out darkness and brought in Amalya and drew us closer to each other.

"Whose photograph is this?" Withdrawing herself from a corner she was now standing between our two beds.

"Your sweetheart?" she asked me brightly.

"No, she is his mother," I said pointing towards the Brazilian.

She looked slightly disappointed and put the photograph back on the table. "Is it true?" she asked the Brazilian.

The Brazilian nodded his head.

"I couldn't even imagine that people could have such young mothers," she said. Holding the cat against her chest she sat down at the edge of my bed. The light of the candle was falling on her face.

"You people live here alone?" She looked around, surveying the basement.

"There is an office upstairs. We live in this basement."

"For how long?"

"This is our fifth day," the Brazilian said. This was his favourite sentence. Only the number of the days varied but not the structure of the sentence.

"No, I wanted to know for how many more days will you be staying here?"

The Brazilian looked at me.

"We are waiting for our papers," I said.

"As soon as they are ready we shall leave this place," the

Brazilian added.

"He too?" she pointed towards the Arab who was ensconsed on his bed.

"Yes, he too," I said.

She fondled the cat. Her fingers were dirty. Under her fingers Monika's downy skin looked ever so white.

"Won't you people like to sleep?" she took us in with her gaze.

"We were sleeping before you came," I said.

"We don't need any more sleep," the Brazilian added, as if correcting me. "We have a nap even in daytime." He had included me also in that 'we'.

"Don't you go out for a stroll in the city during the day?" she said feigning interest in us.

We did not come out with an answer to her question.

"May be you have not liked the city much," she said.

"We don't know much about the city yet," the Brazilian said.

"There's an old castle on top of the hill which all the tourists make it a point to visit," the girl said.

"Have you been living here for many years?" I asked the girl.

"I was born here," the girl said fondling the cat.

Her sense of informality had drawn me towards her. Gone was the nervousness which I had discerned on her face in the beginning. She was sitting with her legs drawn up and looked quite composed as if she could never be in for surprise, as if she had known this basement and our niggardly condition for ages.

The Arab had dozed off and was snoring feebly. The girl looked at him.

"He is gone to sleep," she said in a soft voice, fearing lest he should come awake disturbed by her voice.

The Arab having fallen asleep we were feeling more at home. We had even forgotten that only a short while ago the girl was all alone with him and we were shivering in the

cold outside.

"Perhaps she is feeling cold," the Brazilian said to me.

She was really shivering. Except for the cat she had nothing which could lend her some warmth.

"Haven't you brought your coat ?" I asked the girl.

"Coat?" she laughed loudly. "I left it in the bar. This friend of yours was in a great hurry and I was so heavily drunk that I forgot I had come with a coat on." She pushed the end of her skirt on to her knees.

We couldn't believe that she had come here drunk. In those days we thought that the girls who drank belonged to a different breed and could easily be singled out from others.

This was our fifth day in that city.

"This room of yours is cold. Don't you light a fire?"

"We may be moving out any day," I said. "Are you feeling chilly?"

"No, I'm all right. But. . ." she hesitated and looked at both of us in turn. "Don't you have anything to drink? I mean anything." She placed her finger on her stomach. I'm feeling so empty and cold here."

The Brazilian looked at me. I was staring at the wall as if I had developed a sudden interest in the scurrying of rats.

"I've got some coffee. Would you like to have coffee?" the Brazilian said.

I gave him a surprised look. He had never told us that he kept some stock of coffee handy.

The girl's face lit up. She lifted the cat and put it down on the floor. "You mean you have Brazilian coffee?" she asked.

"Yes, I've brought it from Brazil. My mother gave me some when I was leaving." The Brazilian had suddenly brightened up.

"Where is it?" the girl gave the Brazilian an eager look. "We rarely get the genuine stuff here."

The Brazilian pulled out his suitcase from under his bed and opening it took out a packet of coffee. The girl snatched away the packet from him and smelled it—once, twice and then

fondled it as she had been fondling the cat a short while ago. Her eyes had become dreamy.

"Once I met a Cuban here," she said. "He was a writer. He took me to his hotel room and gave me a bottle of Cuban rum which he said I could take away with me. But the bottle was so big that it could not be accommodated in my purse and it was risky to carry it in hand out of the hotel. I suggested that we should finish it off right in his room. I didn't know that the stuff was so strong. Just two glasses and I started feeling dizzy. But the Cuban continued drinking and kept talking about Fiedel Castro. I asked him if his Fiedel Castro could love me as he had loved me. He was furious and said that Fiedel Castro loved the entire world. . .Who will make the coffee ? You or I ?" She looked at the Brazilian.

The Brazilian had been listening to her with rapt attention. The girl's world seemed to be very magical and we were peeping into it by just whisking away the curtain.

"You won't be able to light the stove," the Brazilian said. "Let me prepare the coffee." Taking the packet from the girl's hand he walked out swiftly. She watched him going with great curiosity. "Your friend ?" she asked me.

"Yes, we live here together," I replied.

"He's so childlike," the girl said thoughtfully. She took out a mirror from her purse and examined her face in it. Then she made her eyebrows with a pencil and powdered her face. Her hand stopped while she was painting her lips as if she had suddenly remembered something. She looked at the Arab who was lying on his side and was sleeping as before. Looking relieved, she promptly put the mirror back in her purse and took out a long, coloured scarf from it. She smoothed it out and covered her head with it.

"How does it look on me?" she turned to me and smiled. I watched her unblinkingly. Had it been some other occasion I would have told her that it looked wonderful on her. And it did look nice, indeed. Some stray locks of hair had escaped from under the scarf, making a dark outline on her forehead.

"You don't get such beautiful silk here," she said feeling the material between her dirty fingers. It appeared as if her fingers were made to have the feel of everything.

She removed the scarf from her head. "It costs five dollars," she said dropping her voice to a whisper.

"You bought it here ?" I asked.

"You don't get such stuff here. He gave it to me," she pointed in the direction of the sleeping Arab. "He told me he had bought it for five dollars. She carefully folded the scarf and put it back in her purse. It was raining outside. She had sat down on the Brazilian's bed with her knees folded up under the blanket and her head reclining against the pillow. She closed her eyes and when she did not open them for sometime I realized she must be having a nap.

We heard a faint noise outside the door and saw Monika coming ahead of the Brazilian. Perhaps the smell of coffee had woken her up. The Brazilian momentarily stopped on seeing the girl sitting on his bed.

The pale candle light was falling on her face, sharpening the outlines of her dark eyebrows. She opened her eyes. "I'm sitting on your bed," she said non-chalantly. "I hope you don't mind."

"No, I don't mind it." The Brazilian's voice faltered. I took away the kettle from him and placed it on the table next to the photograph. We had only one cup. Pouring the coffee into it Brazilian stood set against the wall.

She held the cup between her palms as if she was warming her hands with it. I thought the Brazilian would make some conversation but he stood mute. Six eyes were fixed on the girl—the Brazilian's, the cat's and mine. She didn't even ask us once why we were sitting there looking so high and dry.

"If the coffee is good you don't need anything to go with it." She yawned, smacking of self-satisfaction. She picked up the packet of coffee and looked at the Brazilian from the corner of her eye. "How much did it cost?" she asked him.

The Brazilian hesitated for an instant, looked at the girl

uncertainly and said, "I don't know. My mother bought it for me."

The girl laughed. "If your mother came to know that I'm drinking your coffee she may create a scene."

"She would never know," the Brazilian said.

"Of course, she won't." Amalya laughed and holding his hand pulled him towards her. The Brazilian made no move to resist it. He only looked uncertainly in the direction of the Arab who was lying on his stomach and fast asleep. The Brazilian sat down on the bed by her side. Monika had moved under the bed and was lingering between their legs. She had long since given up the hope of getting some coffee though the desire to keep herself warm was still there.

It was still raining outside. The girl looked around searchingly, steadying the cup of coffee on her knee.

"Your room is not bad," she said. "My room is much smaller."

"Do you live alone?" I asked her. We were gradually becoming informal.

"No, I share it with another girl. She works in a bakery at night When I go out to work I find her asleep and when she goes out to work she finds me asleep." She laughed and looked at us. "We can't meet each other except on Sundays."

"Have you got many friends here?" the Brazilian asked.

She was silent for a moment and then said in a sleepy voice, "Yes, I have friends and yet I don't have friends. Generally they are foreign tourists. Today here, gone tomorrow. They are with me for a day and then they disappear the next day. But you people would be returning—no?"

"May be after a few months."

"They all say that," she said, looking at the candle flame with half-closed eyes. "If I meet them a second time I may not even recognise them."

"But I'll immediately recognise you," the Brazilian said with a tremor in his voice. His lips trembled.

"Really ?" She burst into a laugh. "But I won't be able to

recognise you." She slid her fingers in the Brazilian's hair—dark, curly hair which any girl would feel tempted to touch.

The Brazilian looked at her in dismay. "Are you sure you won't be able to recognise me?"

"I don't know. I'm drunk," she said. "I don't even know what I am talking."

Her voice had suddenly become soft like her fingers which were gently moving through the Brazilian's hair. After a while I felt as if her words had dissolved in a spate of sounds, making it difficult to mark each word in its distinct individuality. Yet one could still 'see' them like the mist floating on the other bank of the river. Having stayed awake the whole night, every thing was looking 'liquid' to me as if in a state of flux. I even seemed to forget that we were in our basement where three shadowy figures were sitting shrunk into themselves under the flickering candle light. I was thinking of some other houses which I had not set my eyes upon for years together. It appeared as if there was another being within me whose presence I could feel but vaguely. And then there were moments when everything looked like molten glass, smooth yet jagged—the Arab lying in his bed and snoring in his sleep, the sound of Amalya's wobbly voice, the Brazilian's laboured breathing, muffled murmurs which sounded neither like the scurrying of rats nor the patter of rain. It was so pervasive that it seemed to have to do something with the entire basement and the darkness which had enveloped the whole of that unfamiliar city. . .

"Are you sleeping?" his head was bent over me.

I got up flustered. I had no idea as to how much time had intervened. First I saw his forehead over which his curly hair were dangling. It amused me to see that he was still holding the cup of coffee between his hands.

"Were you sleeping?" he repeated his question.

"Are you gone crazy?" I had by now come out of the circle of blue fog and dark shadows,

Holding his cup, he continued to stare at me.

"Why are you standing over me?" I asked him. In the dim,

flickering candle light his face had put on a fearful look.

He kept staring at me. Then he said in a subdued voice, "She has vomitted—she has done it on my bed!"

"On your bed?"

"She didn't even finish her coffee."

I could not decide what had upset him more—her leaving the coffee unfinished or vomitting on his bed? I looked around. She was nowhere to be seen.

"Is she gone?"

"No, she is standing at the door. She fears she may vomit again," the Brazilian said.

For a while we heard no sound except that of the melting wax of the candle.

"She should have some sleep," I said in an uncertain voice.

"That's what I also thought," the Brazilian said in an animated voice. "She can't go out in this rain, anyway. But. . ." He hesitated and trailed into silence.

"Yes, what's it now?" I gave him an inquisitive look.

"My bed is not fit to sleep in," he said, his eyes fixed on the floor.

Now only my bed could be spared for her use.

Both of us gave a startled look in the direction of the vestibule. Leaning against the door, Amalya was swaying from side to side as if she was standing on the deck of a tossing ship.

"Let her sleep in my bed," I said.

"And what about you?"

"I'll stay out."

He looked at me steadily and then placed his hand on my shoulder. His hand was shaking.

"I don't want this." His voice seemed to be coming out of some deep hollow.

"The other alternative is that both of us should go out," I said. "But that'll hardly make any sense."

"I feel all right now," Amalya gave a wane smile from where she was standing.

"Shall we call her in?" The Brazilian gave me a questioning

look.

But there was no need to call her. She herself came in, dragging her feet. White and yellow stains had clotted over her skirt at many places. I shifted the blanket to enable her to lie down in comfort. She lay down and placed her head over the pillow. A colourless smile appeared on her face.

"I've spoiled your bed," she said gently holding the Brazilian's hand.

"There's still some coffee left in the cup. Want to drink it?"

She shook her head and stretched out her legs under the blanket. Her eyes were open but she appeared to be sleeping.

I picked up my coat and muffler. The Brazilian caught hold of my hand. "I'll come with you," he said. His whole body was shaking. Not from the cold—I knew when one shook from cold. The shaking I am talking of, a man experiences only once. . . and it is akin to the onrush of fever when the body falls apart from one's very being.

I pulled away my hand from his soft, trembling palms.

"That Arab. . ." he said in a faltering voice.

"Put out the candle," I tapped him on his arm and went out.

That night I was coming out of the basement for the second time.

During our stay in the city that winter, all the days were not alike. Some were short, others shorter still when the lamp-post lights came on as early as the afternoon. It was one of those short winter days. I had been roaming about on the rain-drenched roads—throughout the day. When the evening darkness descended I returned to my basement. There was nobody there. I seemed to be having a slight fever. My teeth had kept chattering for a long time and as I slipped under the blanket everything looked hazy to me. Suddenly I felt as if someone was breathing over me. It was like an animal's breathing, long-drawn, heavy and rough. I just ignored it. Sometimes a man having temperature does not feel right in the head. When he himself is breathing he feels as if it is someone else breathing and when another person is breathing, he feels it is he who is

breathing. But this kind of illusion cannot last long. Someone had lit a candle and then there was the sound of footsteps which stopped near my bed.

"Were you asleep?" It was the Brazilian speaking. I could make out his voice in the darkness even in my feverish condition. The basement was palely lit by the candle.

"Are you all right?" he asked me.

"Yes, I'm all right."

"You were muttering in your sleep," he said.

I lay still. He brought a glass of water for me and sat down at the foot of my bed.

"Hasn't the Arab returned?"

"No, not yet," he said.

I lay silent for sometime. It seemed there was something on his mind but he could not bring himself to the point of telling me about it.

"Didn't you go out today?" I asked him.

"Yes, I did," he said. "In fact I was out the whole day."

"Was she with you?" I gave him a smile.

He also smiled and shifted closer to me. "May I press your head?"

"No, I'm all right."

We were talking in very low tones as if there was something very tender between us which we wanted to touch only with our silence and not with words.

"Do you know there is a river running in the middle of this city?" he said.

"A river? No, I don't". I looked up at him in surprise.

"I was myself not aware of it," he said.

"It's because you keep sleeping in the basement the whole day," I said.

He gave a faint laugh. I could not see his face. I had never heard him laughing.

"Yes, a river," he repeated in confirmation of his statement. "And many islands," he added. "I wouldn't have known about these things hadn't she taken me along with her. Do you know

I hadn't seen an island till now.?"

"But you said you had stayed in England for sometime," I said.

"I don't mean an island of that type," he explained. "I mean an island right in the middle of the city—an island which you can see in its entirety at one glance."

"Was the Arab also with you?" I asked.

"No, we left before he woke up. She wanted to take me round the city before I left. We went to see the islands and then she took me to a restaurant. She asked me whether I prefered wine or vodka. I told her I did not touch liquor. Hearing this she laughed. I felt embarrassed and ordered beer for both."

"Did you have so much money to spend on her?"

"No, she didn't allow me to pay for anything. Listen, as a memento I gave her my packet of coffee. She had taken a fancy to it."

I turned on my side. He thought I was feeling tired. He went and lay down in his bed and put out the candle. In the winter night I could see the pantomime of walking feet on the street through the skylight.

We lay in silence for sometime.

"May I tell you something? But you won't laugh, will you?"

"No, I won't laugh."

"When you were gone I slept with her."

He heaved a sigh. A lifeless sigh which went crawling over the silence of the basement.

I again turned on my side. My pillow had become wet with perspiration.

"I slept with her. But I could do nothing," he said.

I could hear the sound of his breath rising over the silence of the basement.

"Was it for the first time that. . ."

He blew his nose with his handkerchief. "Yes," he murmured. "But I knew everything."

"It often happens like that the first time," I said.

"She also said the same," the Brazilian said.

"Who?"

"Amalya. She told me there was nothing to feel embarrassed about or fear. We can now sleep like brother and sister, she said."

We lay in silence. We could see the sky through the skylight. The glow of the wintry night had spread in the air. Some stray stars twinkled in the sky.

"May I light up the candle? For a short while only."

I thought he wanted to go to the bathroom but after lighting the candle he came to my bed.

"I want to show you something," he said.

I looked at him. A bashful smile was peeping through his moist eyes.

He fished out something from under his bedsheet and placed it before me. I gaped at it.

"She gave it to me." He smiled.

I had recognised it at the first glance—the scarf said to have cost five dollars.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"I'll give it to my mother. She will be so pleased."

He carefully folded the scarf and placed it under his bedsheet. We again lay down in our beds after he had put out the candle.

"Don't show it to the Arab," I said.

"Why not?"

"There is no particular reason for it," I said.

I lay in bed listening to the scurrying of rats. In my fevered state of mind the sound seemed to be so close and intimate. And then a long silence took over. Only once I heard a faint sound from the nearby bed—a subdued and listless sound coming from beyond the frontiers of somnolence. The Brazilian was standing before his mother's photograph, his head bowed in prayer—like he prayed every night. But not quite. For tonight something had come between him and his mother.

A river. . .and some islands scattered in the middle of the city.

Tr. from Hindi by JAI RATAN

The Next Story

J.P. DAS

PEN in hand, Chandrabhanu sat staring at the virginal sheets of paper neatly arranged on the table. The creative juices seemed to have stopped oozing. He wondered what was happening to him. His fame was built on his staggering output, and he wrote a fair amount every morning without fail. Ideas dripped the moment he wielded his pen, and stories and novels scratched themselves out on the paper. Sometimes he was afraid ten lives wouldn't be enough to write down all that he had within him. But today he felt so barren, so empty.

A sudden fear gripped him that he might never write again. He had experienced such a scare some time ago when he failed in bed for the first time. The spectre of impotence had left him all crumpled up for days on end. It had been an agonising time; aphrodisiacs had helped but not overly much, and his heart was on fire.

He had already carved out a niche for himself. His books sold well, and recognition had come in good measure. Only a few days ago he had been feted for the umpteenth time. The citation spoke eloquently of his achievements and hoped he would scale greater heights still. Often a surfeit of unqualified praise kills creativity, he remembered someone telling him. Is that what has happened to me ? Is the praise lavished

on me exaggerated, untrue?

He got up and took out the scrap book. The paper-cuttings were yellow with age. 'This book will show the direction to a whole generation of new writers,' one reviewer had said on his debut. Chandrabhanu hadn't looked back after that. Books came off at regular intervals, and each got better notice than the one before.

His eyes lingered on a review. There was a sentence he had underlined. 'These are,' the reviewer wrote, 'apologies for stories.'

He turned ashen, his hands shook; he re-read the sentence with a sinking sensation in his stomach. A single grain of adverse criticism outweighed the tons of praise. Were those stories mere apologies, he wondered. Why did the other critics praise them then? Did this particular critic have an axe to grind? Did I ever tread on his toes? Did he take an insane dislike to my face? Or was he simply jealous?

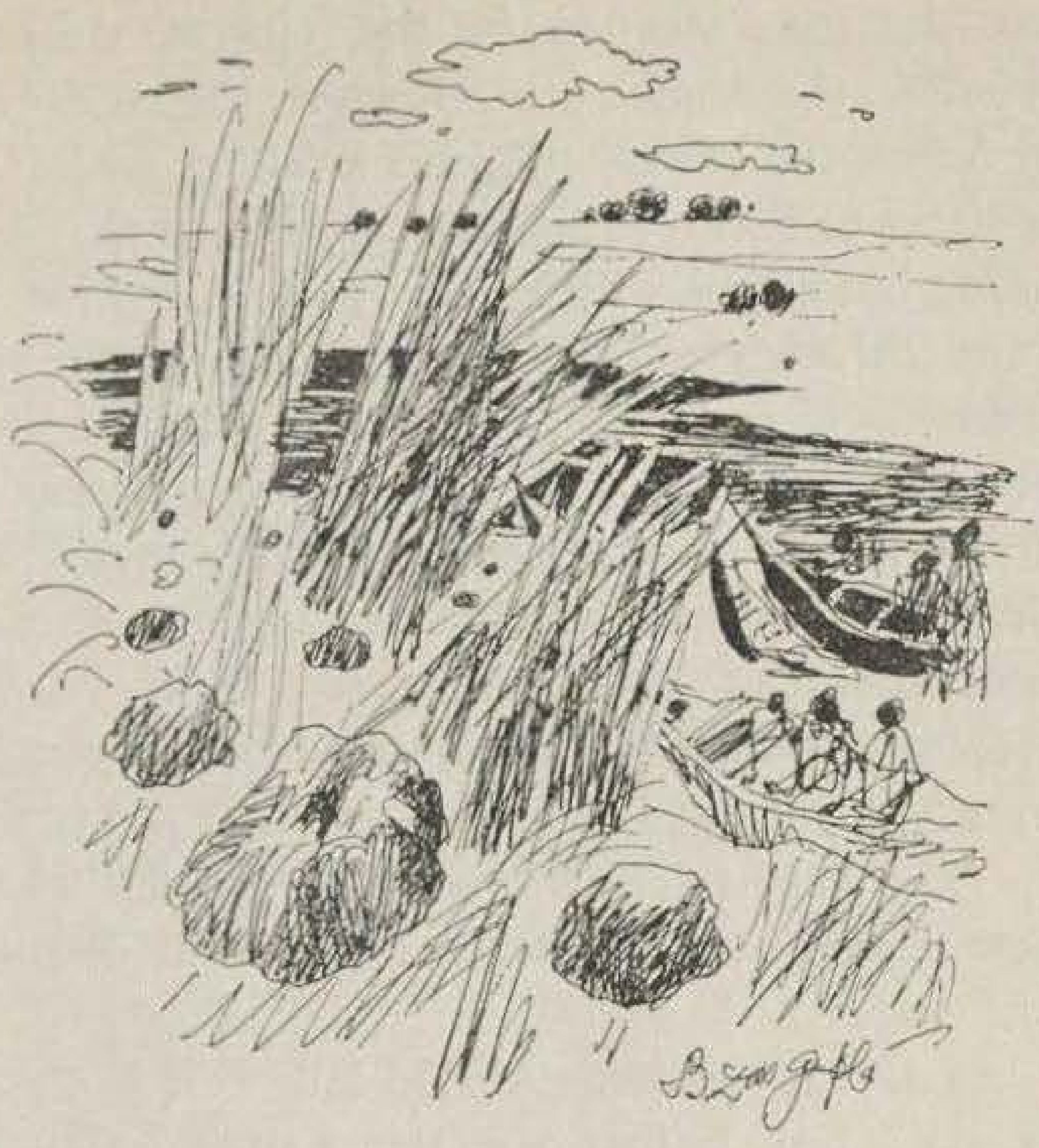
He went to the shelf and pulled out the volume in question and began to browse.

Choosing at random, he read one story from the first word to the last. It had been written quite some years ago, and his style had since changed. If I handled the same theme today, he thought, would I do it the way I've done? I'd tinker with the ending, would love to lop it off a little; and make the beginning a little less sensational; a little surgery in the middle would do no harm. The dialogues could use a trimming. A sigh escaped him. How many years did the story take to pale and wither for me? What'd happen to it after a few more years? Will anyone glance at it after a hundred, fifty, twenty-five, ten years?

He had a sudden wish to disown the story?

Is that lone critic right and the rest wrong, he thought. Is everything I've written trash? Who did I write for—myself, the reader, or the critic, who? The book had sold well, but. Does the success snow the critic under? Can it silence him?

Years ago when he began writing he had the readers in



mind. What will they think of the story ? Will it ring true to them ? He had to see the female readers were not put off by his obsession with sex and the male readers, by his hidey-holy attitude towards the birds and bees. Language, raw, earthy, turgid, of the street, vied with the chaste language of the drawing-rooms and he had to weigh every word before using it. The critics, the vultures, of course, hovered over him all the time. A few familiar faces leaped up like fish from the murky sea of memory. He had worried how they'd react to this book or that, where they'd place him in the contemporary literary scene.

And what did all their opinions amount to?

Gaping at the pile of reviews, he decided he would go back to the reader. If he was responsible to anyone at all, it was him—the faceless, nameless, unknown reader.

But still the uncertainty didn't leave him. The faceless, nameless, amorphous entity of readers. Who were they really? The half-literate nubile village belles waiting to be legally laid?

The town smarties steeped in the cinema culture ? The harassed clerks, the slogging housewives, the greenhorns commuting in buses, the elderly pilgrims awaiting trains, the bored assistant editors of literary magazines, the rivals at game, the pimply young bumpkins with literary pretensions ?

He went through another story and, to his surprise, he liked it greatly. It was neat—lucid, well-crafted, honest. Even a little profound, but not heavy. Did I write this ? he wondered. Boy, I must have been in full cry then. Will I ever write another as good as this? Doubts gnawed at him.

He went back to the reviews again. 'Here is a compelling young writer with a deep understanding of the complexities of the human mind.' Chandrabhanu, old boy, you can't go back, can you? You have to prove yourself worthy of the praise. The review ended rather wistfully : 'We look forward to more from him.'

Hah! As if the heavens would fall if I stopped writing. How long do I have before my literary death? Surely life will still go on. Writing isn't everything. There were other things in life besides writing. One can live life in many other ways, at many other levels. But can I ? What will I do if I don't write? Have I prepared myself for anything else? He broke out in cold sweat.

Wake up, he whispered urgently, picking up his pen. Wake up, sword! I'm fighting for my life. My adversary is strong. But I must hack him to pieces. No protagonist of my stories ever got the better of me.

But who is he, the protagonist? Artist, teacher, doctor, tailor, magician, male prostitute, business tycoon, mafia boss, film star? He had exhausted them all. How about a writer—someone just like me? What name shall he bear? The names that readily occurred to him were the ones he had already used in the past. I ought to make a complete list of the names I've used so far. Names and the professions.

He jotted down the names and professions used in the two stories he had just read. It was as depressing as a shopping

list. He felt awful. But why am I wasting time on all this? Why don't I just sit down and start writing? How does it matter if the same name appears in more stories than one? Haven't I known four men of the same name in real life? It's good they are in different professions, otherwise the confusion would have been considerable. He permitted himself a chuckle.

He pulled the bulky telephone directory towards him and opened it at A. Maybe, I'd come across a few names I'd like. He made a list, but most he felt weren't apt enough for a writer. Is Chandrabhanu an apt name? Oh God, why am I wasting time? What's in a name? Aren't some of the greatest novels full of dull, silly names!

His eyes stopped at Avadhut.

True, there's nothing in a name, but I'd be damned if I called my writer-hero Avadhut. But then why the hell not, oh why the hell not?

He tore up the list, took another sheet of paper and numbered it.

The first line is always the toughest, he braced himself. Don't you know it or what? Come on, write the first sentence and the rest of the story will write itself. The protagonist will strain towards a climax that'd surprise you. So what is Avadhut doing in the opening sentence? Chatting with an editor? Returning with an award? Staring at the stacks of smooth virgin-white-sheets?

He went back to his old stories. How did they begin? A dusty blue train pulled into the station, in one story; the rain came, then more rain and wind, and then on the wings of the evening the fear, in another; in yet another, the wife paused at the door, her heart thudding.

These didn't help.

The first sentence remained unwritten.

He pushed back the chair and paced the floor. It's a block, he sighed. Why struggle? It'll pass. Today or tomorrow. But isn't it a defeat ? No, the first sentence must be hammered

out today.

He rushed to the table, picked up his pen and wrote : In the dwindling afternoon of his life Avadhut found he had gone and used up his fund of creativity.

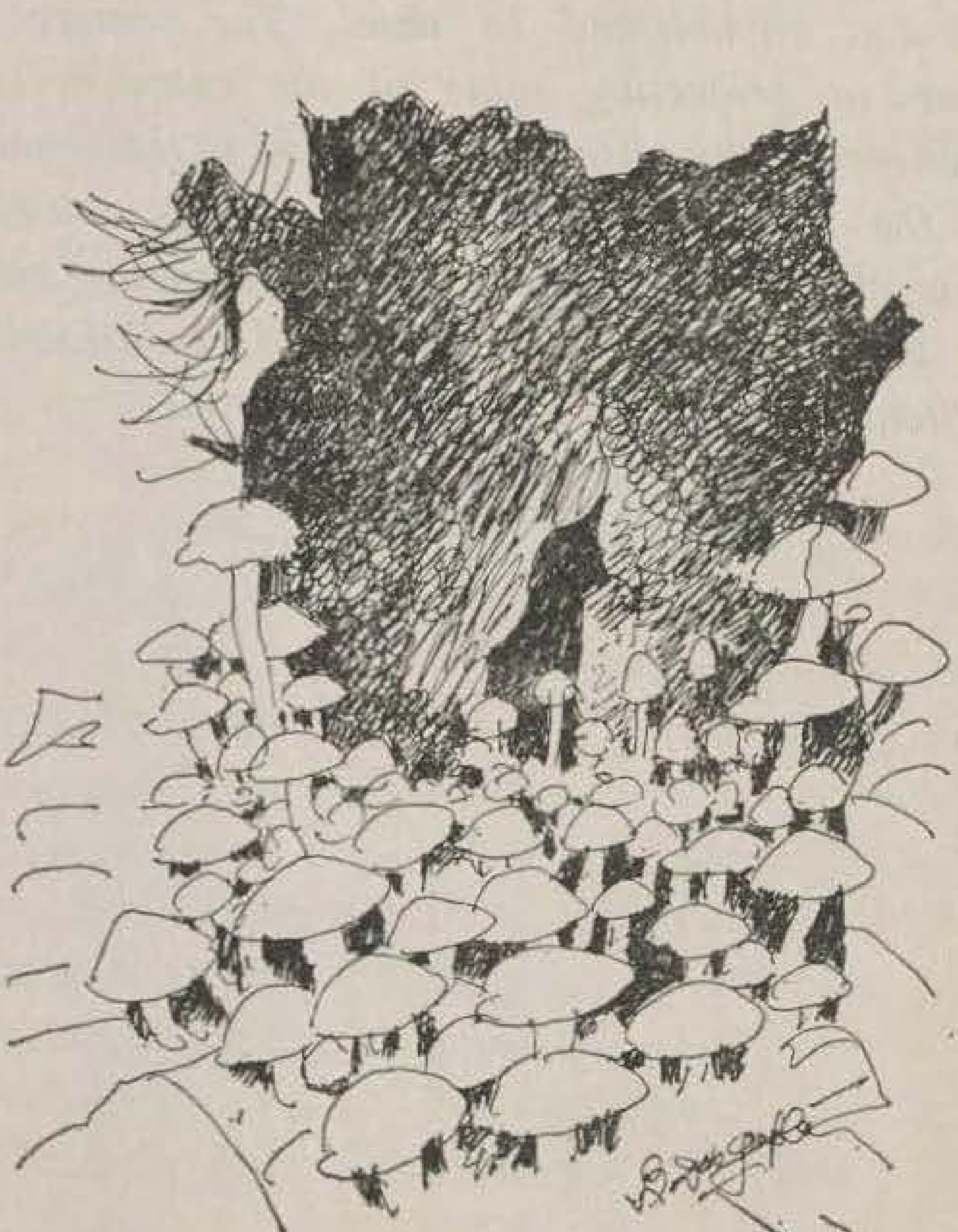
There was no going forward after that. No matter how hard he tried his mind simply refused to cooperate with his pen and he was unable to write the next sentence. But he sat grimly glued to the chair. He fiddled with the sheets, ran his finger at the edge, counted them, doodled a little, capped and uncapped his pen, examined the nib, drummed on the table, waiting for the burst of inspiration. He was relieved that Avadhut had been born. Once born, the fellow would have to grow. By hook or by crook. It was just a matter of time.

Chandrabhanu was not dead yet.

Translated from Oriya by
K.K. & LEELAWATI MOHAPATRA



WORK IN PROGRESS



We introduce this feature in order to bring to our readers excerpts from literary works, uncompleted and unpublished to date. The venture is aimed at projecting some of the contours and nuances of the literature shaping in the country at the moment. We begin the series with part of a chapter culled from the forthcoming novel of Mrs. Raji Narasimhan, noted Indo-English fictionist.—Ed.

Beginning Again

RAJI NARASIMHAN

"WHAT do you wish to do?" Jagat's voice is low, intolerant. He also feels the debut of this I of mine and he means to scotch it. "What are you going to do with yourself ?"

"I must go away."

"Don't say that. Think before you say that." He pauses. "Krishna, there are bitter pills everyone has to swallow in life. You are not alone in this. You are not an exception. You are nothing tragic." He pauses again. "I want children. I want to start a family, home, everything. Forget your inner cry, Krishna. It is an intangibility, an illusion. It is too late to be chasing illusions. There is only the future now. Think only of the future."

I don't say anything. I am thinking of people I can count on. I am thinking of my father. I avoid thinking of my mother. I think about what goods I can take, what would represent and define my toddler self. Some clothes, some saries that express an ancient vibration with certain colours, my books, that is all, all that is truly me, truly mine.

Jagat becomes insulting, personal.

"You'll never find a job," he prophesies.

"I am dreading that situation myself. But I am hopeful, prayerful."

"You have got a man somewhere."

This jolts, and revolts too. But it makes me grow up in a sudden explosion inside. These are the standard accusations thrown at a girl breaking sacred ties, I know at once, without previous experience. I am going to join the ranks of a chosen, select body of women. I am getting my initiation, I tell myself, fighting terror, the threat of loss of control and direction.

*

I must pause. I am breathing fast at the prospect of living that time again, that time of stark terror when I journeyed back to my parents' house. I felt empty in the stomach, I remember. I cannot call it hunger, for I do not remember having eaten all that day, nor the next day nor the next many days. But I must have eaten, because cooking, apportioning the food and eating were ritualised acts in our house. So I must have eaten. But why cannot I see myself in any juxtaposition with food in that period of time? Perhaps because food and eating had become charged, explosive matters in that period. Feelings intervened too much. Each sitting at the table I made was an occasion of guilt and shame, and an acute intensification of the cries of my newly awakened 'I' to be fed by an independent gathering of food and not by the charity of my mother. I always disregarded the cries. I had no choice. I had no kitchen of my own, none of the tools for setting up that laboratory in which woman puts her hands to usage in one of their earliest integral functions. I always left the table with my hunger appeased but my shame raging.

If only I could remember the items I consumed at that time! If only I can say, "I am sitting over a plate of rice and curry, feeling the steam waft over my face", I could make a beginning for this section of my story. But I cannot say it. I cannot for the life of me see myself at that time making any routine contact with food. I must obviously have done my eating in a state of stupor and amnesia. I have to, therefore, think of alternatives. And the only alternative I can think of, one in

keeping with the drives of this story, is to trail myself making my re-entry into my parents' house. I shall have to live that terror a second time.

*

I am standing in the back regions of the house. My father is with me. How have I got here? No. I can only state the fact: 'I have got here.' The back regions where the bathroom is, has been selected involuntarily by both of us as the most appropriate point of regrouping for helping me effect re-entry into the house. He had opened the door for me. He took my bag from my hand.

"You expected me, father?" My breath is fast and my voice low like a spy's with a fellow spy.

"Jagat phoned the office," he grins, a secret delighted grin of complicity. "He gave me precise information on when you had left, what time you would be reaching here."

He leads me in. We look at each other. He is smiling, worried and lost.

"Don't collapse here. She'll come out. She's asleep now, God be praised."

I sway on my feet. I just want something to lean my back on. He thinks for a moment and leads me by the hand to the back portion.

"Looks stealthy, doesn't it? Clandestine. Smelley. But it's the only place out of her earshot. And the tail is as good as the head to start from, don't you agree? Here."

He unfolds a blackened, wooden folding chair for me to sit on. For himself he takes the fence of an old, discarded bedstead.

"It didn't work then?" He sinks his arms into the top surfaces of his thighs.

"You knew it wouldn't. You are not surprised. I am not also, really, for all my broken look."

"There's special suffering ahead of you, you sweet, silly girl. It's suffering reserved for girls like you meant by nature for higher living but deficient in decisiveness. Your mother

won't spare you. And I will be in no position to do more for you than lighten your mood, keep your spirit up, offer verbal consolation. You have brought this on yourself, Krishna. Couldn't you have avoided it, silly girl?"

"I'll take all the punishment due to me, father. I am toughened now."

A silence falls between us.

"There's no easy way out ever, Krishna. That's the lesson you have learnt, haven't you?"

I stare at him dumbly. A lot is unspoken and understood between us. I think he understands the thankless schooling through which I have put my body during these six months or so. It has been hard for you, yes, he is admitting without words as he stands up from his bed frame, careful not to set it creaking and wake my mother. But even this futile learning has not come without sweat, has it, he asks, his mouth shut and his eyes studying my face in the semi-light thrown in by the street lamps.

I want to ask him what I should learn that is not futile, what I should prepare myself for. Half my terror just now is in not knowing this, I want to tell him. But he is leading me into the house, gently detaching me from the back areas and helping me walk back into the living areas. My mother has never knocked on the door of this room before entering. There are steel trunks filled with faded fineries and useless, over-ornamented giftware and baubles presented to my parents at *their* wedding, stacked on one side. This biggish extra room, meant to accommodate mouldering merchandise that carry a right to shelter prior to mine, had been extended to me in a freak gesture of magnanimity by my mother, ever since I came of age and sought privacy.

"This is your room now", my father tells me. "I leave it to you to make it yours fully by the force of your personality." He makes me sit on my bed, still left there.

The narrowness of the bed disturbs me. I cannot understand why. It ought not to, considering the traumas that the

vastness of the other bed has caused me. But I find myself wanting space, unboundedness. I want the walls of the room broken, the sides of the bed pushed away. I want the walls of my very body burst and be thrown open to the bare winds.

"It is a dingy closed room, yes", my father reads my mood. "Was it always so, Krishna? I never noticed, somehow. Didn't it ever have curtains and things?"

"Why are you missing curtains, father ? When have we ever had furnishings ? Haven't we always felt superior to them?" I speak in sagging tones.

He gives an embarrassed smile.

"That's true, of course. What makes me think about curtains?" He laughs, but carries on. "I'll get you a table and chair, to sit at and work. Wouldn't that be nice?"

"Work at what, father?"

"Anything! Writing, say! Why not?"

He is serious. His guide's, steady look melts the confinement of the room. For the first time I think of writing as the creation of inner space, as the digging out of the space buried within me by scrub and bush.

We stay silent together. It is late. The night's hush rises several notches higher as our voices extinguish in the cessation of talk. He veers slightly towards me, smiles and goes out.

When I open my eyes in the morning my mother's face is peering down at me.

I rise slowly. I come to sitting position, but I am afraid to stretch out my legs for the ground and leave the support of the bed. The interval of a second or so that lies between leaving the bed and gaining the floor seems a bottomless abyss of time I cannot cross without mishap. My mother could do me physical injury during the cross over. I watch her, alert for the safe moment to spring to the floor.

But she moves away and takes up position at just the distance from where she can talk, and also hold me in leash.

"I heard you come in last night. You didn't fool me", she says wryly.

I am out of the bed. I want to slip out, reach the safety of the bathroom.

My father has come in.

"Don't begin your terrorising straightaway. Give her time to get her breath back", he moves up and stands facing my mother, a buffer between us.

"She is going back this minute", my mother rages like a man, an inferior man compared to my father. "I shall take her back. Or you will. One of us will. She is not staying here."

"She is, Susheela, she has to."

"You are going to destroy her! You and your unworkable ideas will finish her."

"No. I and my unworkable ideas will save her. She understands my unworkable ideas. You never did, did you? You never wanted to."

"Don't listen to him. Don't come under his spell. Accept life, Krishna. It's life you are running away from." She appeals to me exclusively, shutting him out of her purview.

She's passed into her near-hysterical, over-intense state which is easy to ignore. I make my getaway. A course of action is chalking itself out in my mind. I am not questioned as I move out of the room. Across its threshold is the small square area that is the junction of the fore and aft portions of the house, now bathed in the clear morning light. I breathe easy. But it is a precarious ease. My mother is powerful and has a vast amount of unspent, righteous energy. My father can only bring about these occasional lulls. He can give me his pep talks only in secret, without her knowledge. I must look for other means of propping myself.

*

I break pen again.

The mountain is blue now, a smoky grey-shot blue that speaks of the passage of hours.

I want to tell you of a private passion of mine. I worship the Romantic Poets. I remember the first time I read these lines in college :

> Alas I have no hope nor health
> Nor peace within nor calm around
> Nor that content surpassing wealth
> The sage in meditation found

I must have been sixteen then. I remember being in total harmony with the lines, my own voice suddenly released within me like a hidden record springing to life and keeping time with Shelley's song. I had not had any of the intense frustrations described in those lines. How could I? I was only sixteen years old, a student in the first year of college. But the sadness and hopelessness seemed pre-experienced and pre-known. More. I thought the opposite of sadness, happiness, was never to be mine easily. Happiness would come to me without foreknowledge, without sign or warning, I felt it would take me by storm. I was having my preliminary thoughts about metamorphosis already, as you see.

This fellowship with Shelley upsurged in those three days or so of floundering between my return home and my deciding on a course of action. I read the lines again, and I thought their sadness had put out a whole order of branches and intertwining arms into me, that I was connected to the sadness by a dense tapestry of forest and jungle. I wanted to share this wealth of sadness with minds and ears I knew to exist.

I shall resume writing now.

*

I am sitting opposite my old school principal, a woman with white locks and a set, professional's look. But what I say to her breaks down the set look, and ribbons of pleasure spread over her face.

"Did I, really? I made you cry with my teaching of Shelley, did I?"

I used to come to her after class, I remind her. And we

used to talk about the poems. We used to talk about their sadness. We used to agree that this sadness was very important, that it was important to feel its full weight and proportion just as Shelley meant it, that it was more than mere sadness.

I am garrulous.

"I remember it all very well, Krishna", she smiles. "I still read Shelley when I have the time." She hears the desperate note I am trying to keep out of my voice, and she reads the signs of crisis upon me, as one woman can upon another.

I know I am being read. I become reckless. Or perhaps I lower guard consciously. I do not know. I send up a prayer to Shelley. I stake the bonds forged in my school days between this straight-talking white haired old woman seated before me, and I. I stake our shared feelings about Shelley, our common femininity.

"I want a job. I can teach English poetry. I can teach it well, from the heart."

Is she angry? Does she feel blackmailed? And has she been roused to contempt and pity? But I don't look contemptible or pitiable, I know that. I drive people to dares, I know. Her anger doesn't issue in words. It drains out of her eyes, leaving them limp. Shelley stands me in good stead. You cannot be casual about your devotion to Shelley. You cannot take his name in vain.

"There is only a leave vacancy now" she says. "When this person returns, that is in some six months or so, you will have to go."

I am in danger of some swooning hysterical gesture, such as clutching her hand and carrying it to my eyes and kissing it with my eyes.

*

My writing table is slowly becoming a control tower for me. Sitting at it, enveloped in the hum of thought and the electric heat released by my steady, pushing hand, I feel in fine communion with the farthest reaches of the house. I feel that

with just a tremor of the mind, like the tremor a horse makes with its mane, I can feel out to the distant, outermost room, the backyard with its boundary wall, and all the leftward portions of the house. I don't know if this heady sense of mastery will vanish if I stopped writing, if this writing image of me and the physical designs of it vanished. The patterns and forms that the body falls into automatically, in obedience to the dictates of a chosen task, are very important, don't you think? They are the final and invariable outcomes, the very blossoms, of the coupling of the psychic and the physical. This blossoming has come to me but recently, with a dramatic and confusing coincidence of upheavals within and without me. I do not yet know how the petals of this blossom are joined, how far down its stem goes, how firm the corolla is, what parts of the plant will protest and shake if the blossom is plucked. I do not know, that is, if the vanishing of the physical outlinings of my writer's self, and the cessation of the electric hush of concentration it radiates, will tell on the sense of mastery over the spaces of the house that I feel. My mother is not a part of the house any more. She left my father and the house at that time about which I am to tell you yet. My father left around the same time. I don't think he will return. Will David return? I speculate idly about it. There is no compelling reason for him to return.

*

I am standing in the trim, compact room of the modernist school building, teaching. My hands are making their surprising, untaught gestures that seem like deeper meanings of the poem I am explaining. I have loosened up within since getting this job. My hands, laughing and dancing with sudden release, almost run away from me.

Fondly, and also wearily because even this release has taken so long for me to again, I regard my hands conveying the feelings I intend to convey, over and above the ordinary meanings.

No song but sad dirges
Like the wind through a ruined wall
Or the mournful surges
That ring the dead seaman's knell.

"Dirges", I tell them the word. I give it to them. It's my word. It makes me hear my own cries about which I have been mostly silent. And at the same time, it separates me from their weight. It *shows* me their weight, whereas formerly, I couldn't see the weight, only feel it.

But the girls do not take the word in the spirit in which I am giving it. They want the plain meaning.

"What is the meaning of dirges?" They ask impatiently and not too impolitely.

I do not like to tell them in four cold words 'Dirges are funeral songs'. I know they understand 'funeral' and I know what they will think as soon as I say 'funeral songs'. They will think of other people's funerals. They will think of other people singing. But dirges, in the way the word sounds, are not only other people's. They are your own too. 'Dirges', the word, has an inward look. It pours back into you. And this you have to make them understand.

I make another attempt to bring the word to them, slip it live into their minds. I try to do this with the help of the word 'sad'. They will understand 'sad'. Even they can't escape the way it sinks back into you, with its 'a' sound.

"In a sad heart there will not be music. It will be dark and lonely like an empty chamber. And the wind will blow through this empty chamber. It makes the heart more sad and more lonely. The heart will cry then, like the wind. It will make sighs then, like funeral chants."

The girls stare and look sad in response. But they have not yet connected it all with 'dirges'. And while they are in this indefinite state I turn and write on the blackboard, 'Dirges are funeral songs'. My timing is exact. I know I have made a passage into their minds, triumphing over their penchant to break into laughter.

I recite the lines again:

No song but sad dirges
Like the wind through a ruined wall
Or the mournful surges
That ring the dead seaman's knell.

"Dead Seaman's knell?" They are asking now. I am ready. 'Knell' is my word too. It has overtones which I also have, it speaks of the past which my personality also speaks of.

"When a sailor dies in the ship in which he is sailing, the other sailors throw his body into the sea. Afterwards they ring a bell."

Death, ship, the sea, water and waves—I feel happy saying these words. I feel I have known their meanings through an intimacy other and stronger than direct experience. I feel that all that I have been through with Jagat has become converted into the shapes and ideas of these things, which are fluid and make you think of a crossing into some other country.

My hands are keeping up with my voice. They droop when I say 'die', and rise up gently into sitting postures when I depart from the text and speak my own thoughts about ships and their true ports of calling, about the sea and its own way of suggesting infinity. I wake my girls carefully to the proposition I am placing before them: that the large as life has an abstract essence.

The girls stare at my hands. Again, they restrain their readiness to giggle.

I go on to the next lines :

When hearts have once mingled
Love first leaves the well-built nest
The weak one is singled
To endure what it once possessed.

I pause after reading these lines. I can feel the girls pause with me. I know what they are going to ask.

"Explain 'when hearts have once mingled' ", a testing voice

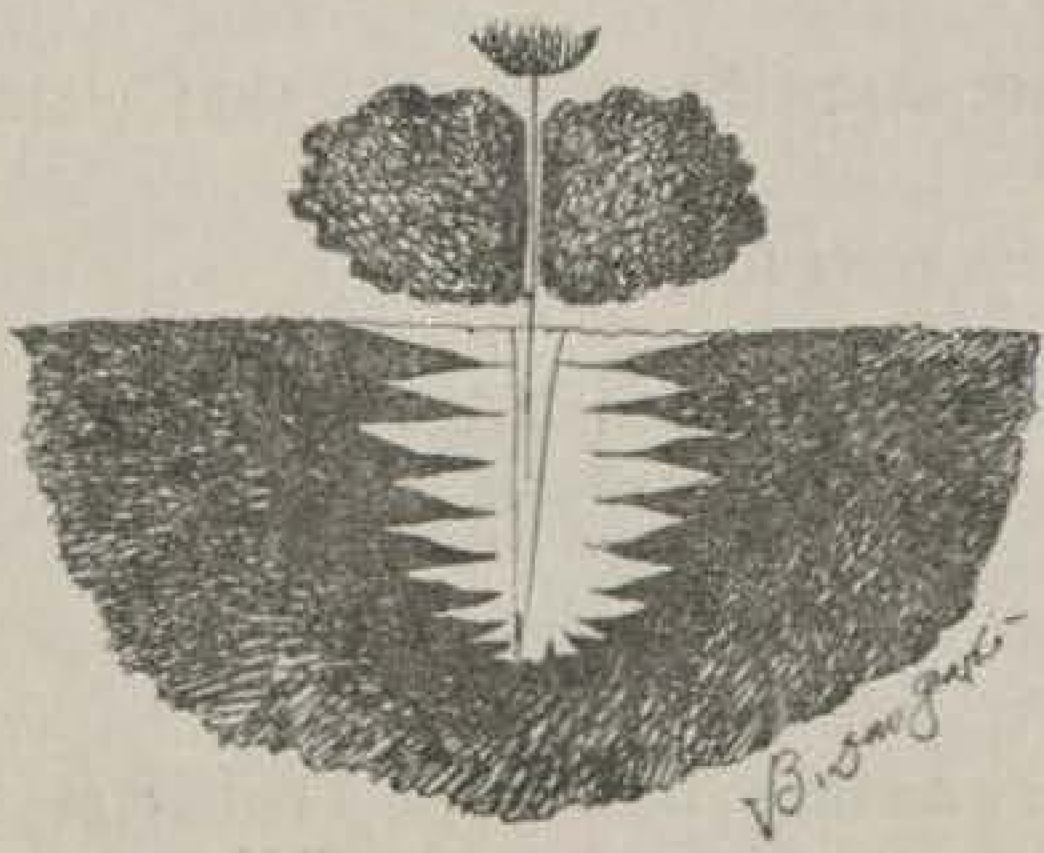
demands.

"It means that love soon becomes the past tense." I speak without bitterness, with a mature ache that takes me by surprise and delight as much as my hands do. "For some time, as you know, love is in the present tense, and also in the future tense. But soon it becomes the past tense. And this past is now to serve present and future both."

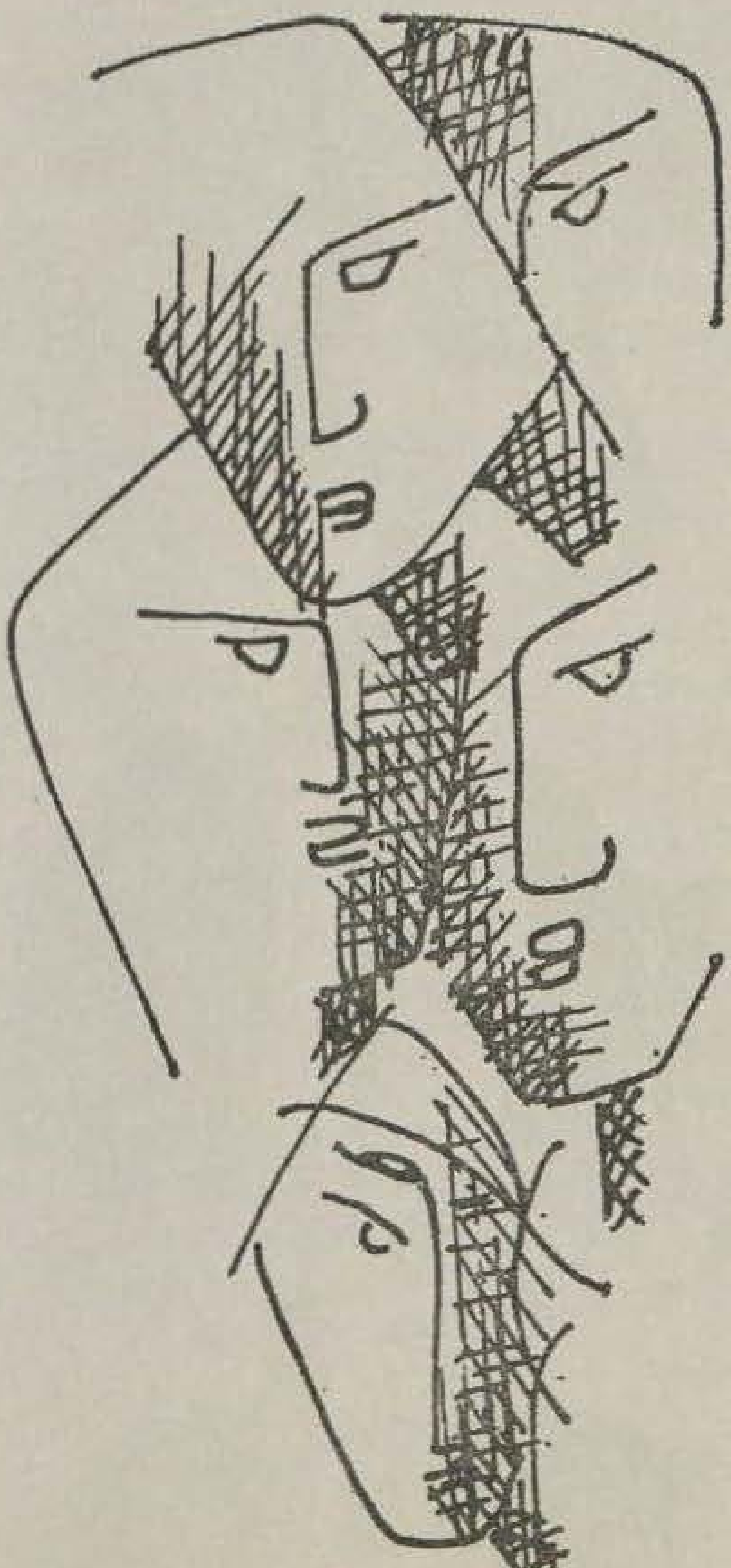
They dimly sense the point of what I am saying. They do not seem to be happy with it. But the poem is there to corroborate me. Shelley is behind me, giving me support.

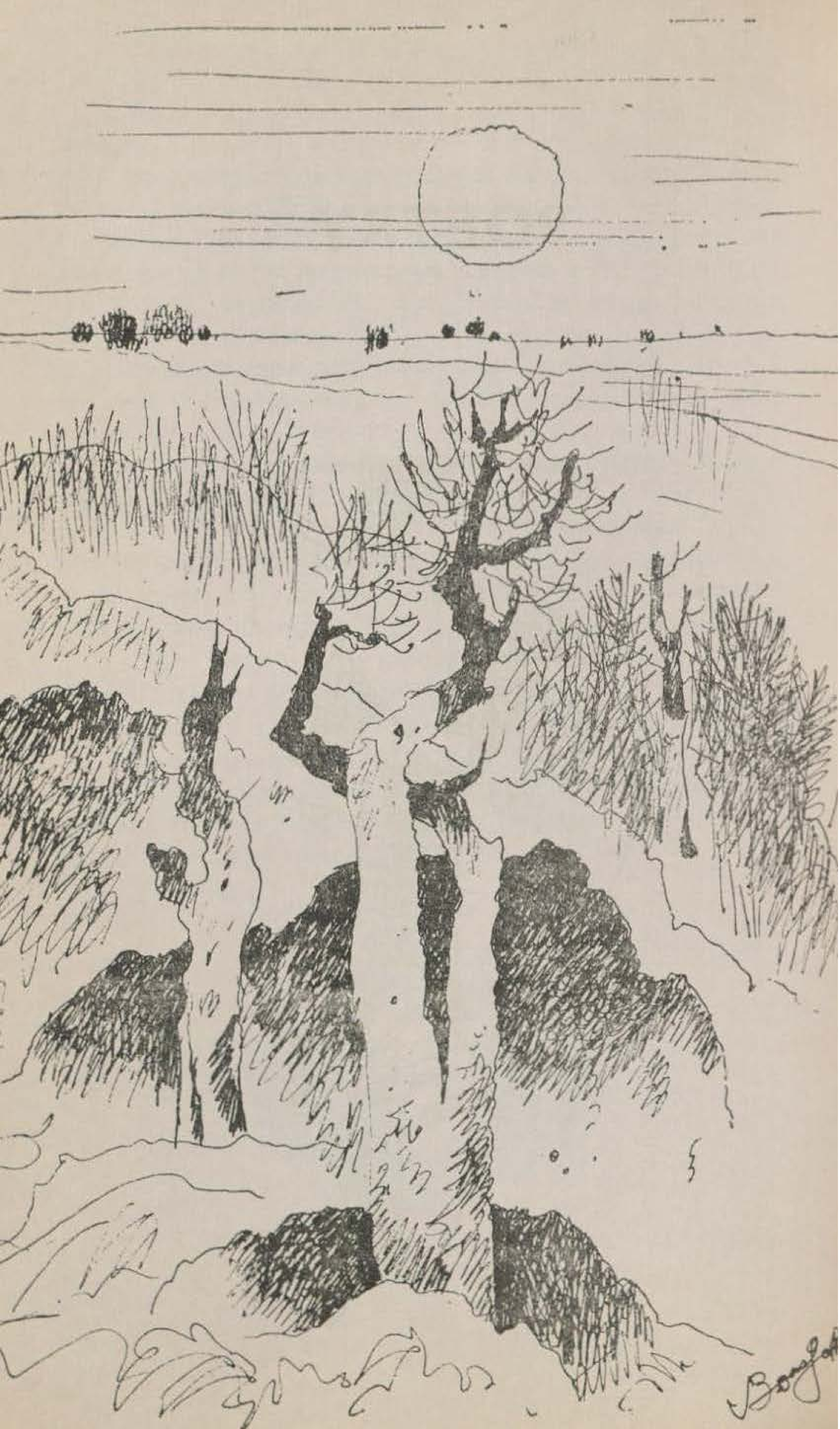
The girls bow to forces mightier than themselves. "Give us notes", they demand in routine, practical tones. I do so. In-front of me stretch away scruffy, fluffy, shiny, scaly, curly or oily black heads bent over their note books. My voice is robbed of real speech. My hands are laid to rest. I watch my students' busy, moving hands at their stolid motions as they jerk their pens up and down their copy books. Offloaded on my island of silence, I think of the other island, England.

English and England. Shelley. David. Freedom. A consciousness spring cleaned and restored. Fantasies leap and vault in my mind. Unbeknownst to me my simple and spontaneous involvement with Shelley and the Romantic poets has got extended to these farther spheres.



POETRY





SEVEN POEMS OF BULLEH SHAH

Abdullah Shah, who is known to every Punjabi as Bulleh Shah, was born in a family of Syeds in 1680 and lived in Kasur, just across today's India-Pakistan border from Ferozpur.

Trained and educated in the orthodox, religious ways of Syeds, Bulleh Shah's urge for mystic experience and knowledge came to him in early youth, and his search for a Master, a *murshid*, led him to Shah Inayat. As with all mystic poetry, Bulleh Shah's is a poetry of longing for union with his Master, for realization of Truth.

Bulleh Shah's is probably the most widely quoted, recited and sung poetry of all the poets that the Punjab has produced. He writes usually in what is known as the Majhi dialect of central Punjab, considered to be "standard Punjabi", but employs dialectal variations freely from Saraiki of the western, Pothohari of the northern and Doabi of the eastern districts. He writes ordinarily in the *kafi* form of poetry, but flexibly.

In the seven poems rendered here, though, the first and the fifth are quatrains and the remaining, couplets. A notable feature of Bulleh Shah's poetry is that it coincides with the speech rhythm of popular Punjabi parlance, is easily and naturally assimilable in commonly spoken Punjabi. Also notable is his employment of a remarkably modern diction.

Translating poetry is a risky business. The translator—especially when rendering has to be from one linguo-cultural tradition to another—has to balance himself between textual faithfulness and poetic truth. This balance has been attempted in the renderings that follow.—*Tr.*

1

In the season of buds and blossoms
Birds flutter down and peck
For food

Hawks prey on some
Some are trapped and some
Would turn back
Some are turned on the spit

Where is certainty?
Who will escape what must be?

2

Let us go
Where they are blind

And will not know
Nor care about us and our
Kind.

3

His face light
The world a veil

He hides behind
The veil
Draws a cloak to conceal
His face.



4

Vendors crowd holy places
Thieves the houses of God
Usurers throng the mosques

Adorers stay away.

5

They say, Go pray
In the mosque.

What profits prayer
In the mosque

If prayer is not said
In the heart?

What profits washing
If prayer does not wash
In the heart?

Without a Perfect Master
Your prayer is no prayer.

6

Damn prayer,
Throw mud on fasting,
Black out the *kalma* with ink!

I found my Love when I turned
Within,
People search clueless.

7

The mullah and the torch-bearer
Are of a kind in this,

They offer light to others,
Themselves in darkness.

Tr. from Punjabi by RAKSHAT PURI



PREMENDRA MITRA

Not the Terrace

Dont go up the open terrace
up so high,
For the sky is vast and limitless
up there.
The stars look down, with boundless questions
in their eyes,
They will shatter all your dreams
forever more!

Let us rather sit by the window
you and I
Gazing at the little lane that's
just outside.
See the gaslight quiver on
the wayside grass,
Listen to the city's hum
in soft content!

Then I'll look into your eyes
and you in mine
In the dusky twilight of our
unlit lamp.
And we shall discover more than
what we see,
Your eyes just like the ocean, will seem
boundless too!

If you like, come close to me
your hand outstretched,

Hold my hand and lay your head
upon my breast,
Your fragrant hair shall be for once
my deep, dark night,
The dot upon your brow shall be
my dearest star!

Hold on to this world we know and
all things known
Let it stand between us and the
vast, blank sky,
The foam which rises, from each churned up
moment lived
Inebriates and makes us forget
every doubt!

An endless riddle stares, my love,
Above, below!
So build a solid nest for now
of love intense.
The boundless sky is out to shatter
all our dreams,
Let the bliss of this dear moment
be all ours!

Dont go up the open terrace
up so high,
For the sky is vast and limitless
up there.
The stars look down with boundless questions
in their eyes,
They will shatter all your dreams
for evermore!

'Chate Jeo Na Ko'



Beyond the City

Have you ever lost yourself
In an open field, directionless,
Beyond all roads and market place
Beyond the city
Where the sky spends all its time
With a lone and single cotton tree?

There the earth lies down in rest
With closed eyes and heart outspread
After treading countless roads
In eager quest!
The cotton tree stands by its side
In silent rest.

Those who desperately seek this road
May find this open field
A vast expanse!
They would then gaze in wonder
Up and down
And on all sides.

There are no roads to see
And yet one finds a clue
To some other hope,
After losing track of every road
One finds oneself!

Do lose yourself some day
Beyond this city of known faces
In that unknown realm
Where a lone cotton tree
And the sky
Stand face to face
Each gazing mutely at the other's eyes!

'Hariye'

Blue Day

There have been
So many rains, such storms, such darkness, clouds. . .
Does the sky remember it all?
My heart, likewise, forgetting all
Is a festive blue today!

You are, you exist
Is a wonder I can hardly bear!
The woods tremble
I whisper your name to myself
As the sunlight spills across the sky
Like molten gold.

PREMENDRA MITRA

The sun, like molten gold
Spreads into all my thoughts—
A flock of doves, intoxicated by the sun
Swims across the blue waves of the breeze
With golden wings outspread.

Perhaps there lies
At the end of this blue day
A maze of clouds
To blot out the sun—
But even then, I've filled my heart today
With this blue nectar of dreams.

Memories wrap the heart
In so many folds
Which threaten to kill.
But even then, let this slip of a moment—
A short-lived spark
Glow and smile in the darkness.

A shooting star
Which arises from the cold infinity
To sparkle in the earth's
Merciless breath,
Making me see the horizon of the Steppes
And a flood of flowers
Hemmed in by snow at both ends!

This blue day
Which falls from your eyes
And spreads across the horizon of my life
Longs to entwine my heart, in vain
With memories
Which threaten to kill!

'Neel Din'

Tr. from Bengali by SWAPNA DUTTA

S.H. VATSYAYAN 'AJNEYA'

Islets in the River

We are the islets in the river.
We don't wish her pass us by.
She lends us shape.
These corners, creeks, juts, hillocks and sandy dunes—
She has shaped them all.

She is the mother! We are because of her.
We are the islets, not the river
Steadfast is our commitment in the midst of fleeting waters.
We never float along;
Floating along is to be reduced to sandy specks,
Wherefore we shall cease to be.
Uprooted, innundated, crumbling shall we be swept away.

And thus undone, can we ever be the flowing river?
As specks of sand we shall only make her water rather defiled,
And render it unfit for use.

Islets we are! This is no curse; this is our ordained lot.
We are the progeny of the river, seated in her lap.
She links us with the land beyond the banks
And land is our progenitor.

Flow on, O river!
Let the heritage of which we have ever been the heritors
Be cleansed and purified.

Flow on, O river, surging, swift and roaring,
Flow on and on.
O, the undoer of deeds and glories—our very doom

Be thou the bloody fury.
We welcome that too. Reduced to specks of sand,
We shall get sifted again, reborn and raised
Into a new identity.
O mother! may you remould us all.

'Nadi ke Dweep'

Across the Yard

Across the yard
There is a door,
And across the door
The yard.
Across the house
All sides merge
Into one, wherein
Got lost
The house.

Who is the door-keeper?
Who stands in front of it?
Who knows?
The god inside, however,
Touched in veneration
Again and again
The feet of the keeper.

'Aangan ke Paar'

A Droplet Suddenly Sprang

I saw :
A droplet suddenly
Sprang off the sea surf
And was flushed
In the fire of the setting sun.

It became evident to me:
Each enlightened identity
Is deliverance
From the blemish of mortality.

'Ek Boond Sahsa Uchhli'

The Ocean is Calling

Whenever a fish squirmed
In the ocean,
We gauged its depth;
Whenever a meteor
Fell from the firmament
No body could tell where,
We realized the boundless void.

Whatever is, is;
Isness itself is
The unknown truth.
Whatever takes place,
The taking place of it,

Which we say we know
Is the limit and measure.

Whatever is, is swaddled
By the boundless is,
Wherein comes to pass and
The passing of which itself
Is its isness.

Therein our understanding
Seeks, finds,
Flexes, fumbles for meaning,
Progresses and regresses.

Our meaning
However deep it might be
Isn't in the ocean
But in our fish
Swaddled by the ocean.
He is calling us aloud
Not we him.

'Ter Raha Saagar'

Tr. from Hindi by AJIT KHULLAR

Ghazal

Sights and sounds
beyond the realm of the possible
they were yours.
In the fastness of my eyes
a bright image—it belonged to you.

The lips whose touch
was healing, they were yours.
The word that was worth
a hundred pearls,
it belonged to you.

The dreams that turned away
from me, were yours
unsleeping, homeless for seven years
I belonged to you.

You whose body is
like a dusky home on air—
I, the destiny of a painting
on water, I
belonged to you.

Ghazal

In a stone's grey shade
a poppy bloomed last night

two little girls today
broke its neck, my honoured Sir!

My eyes had no light, only
Gods' name
I broke my legs and
sat at home. What else
could I have done, my honoured Sir!

There's no store in town
that sells the bright blue sun
To whom then should I sell
my words, my tune
dear honoured Sir?

'Patthar ki bhuri ot men lala khila tha kal'

Ghazal

Steep and crimson
hard and blue
tall and far
sky.

Home to paling sun
darkly flowing
sky.

Cold and quiet
sable roadway
trampled under rushing lamps.
Wrapped in a cloak of
holes, and scarry bright
sky.

Drowned for
countless ages
past and future
in the traceless pond of night,
With my waking
suddenly brightening
sky.

Flowing, flying far on
exploding light
looking up, everywhere
Right in my face
what I see
sky.

A dancing, wandering
spark in midnight's breast—
that was my attempt at
being funny;
Still and silent
sky.

'Surkh sidha sakht nila dur unca asman'

Untitled

Into the shy, scented ear of the night
she whispered : That one far away
yet bright before me like my heart
who throbs like a tiny thorn
in the soles of my feet, in the rosy cheeks

of the palms of my hands
He who is elusive rain on my body's pasture
whose eyes' murderous desire
gives me no rest, keeps me eager
like one hoping for the sight
of an invisible flower : he
arrives tonight.

But he didn't come that night either
How could his broken wrists support
all those dreams, all those promises
all those vows to meet again?
How could his glazing eyes retain
her bright body's image
her lips shimmering with hot
sultry blood?

The dark night saw
nothing. Nor did it want to hear.
Its delicate ears and dark eyes
hear and see no evil.

'Andheri shab ke sharmile muattar kan men us ne kaha'

Tr. from Urdu by the Author

RAKSHAT PURI

Meaning—I

Words summoned do not measure my thought
Because the thought in urgent excess seeks
Equation with sound submerged and the truth
Of movement in your mind's placid lake.

My unbroken mirror conceals wandering storms,
And the large calm carries a secret rage
Of straining wishes dressed in abstract norms
That make my argument itself my cage.

Across the lake your question shapes the dark
And dries a gesture, weighs meaning with the mind's
Slow research beneath a fading spark.
Evening draws ruthless to the lowered blind.

Words have pursued meaning since the first theorem,
Now bear with me as my meaning pursues them.

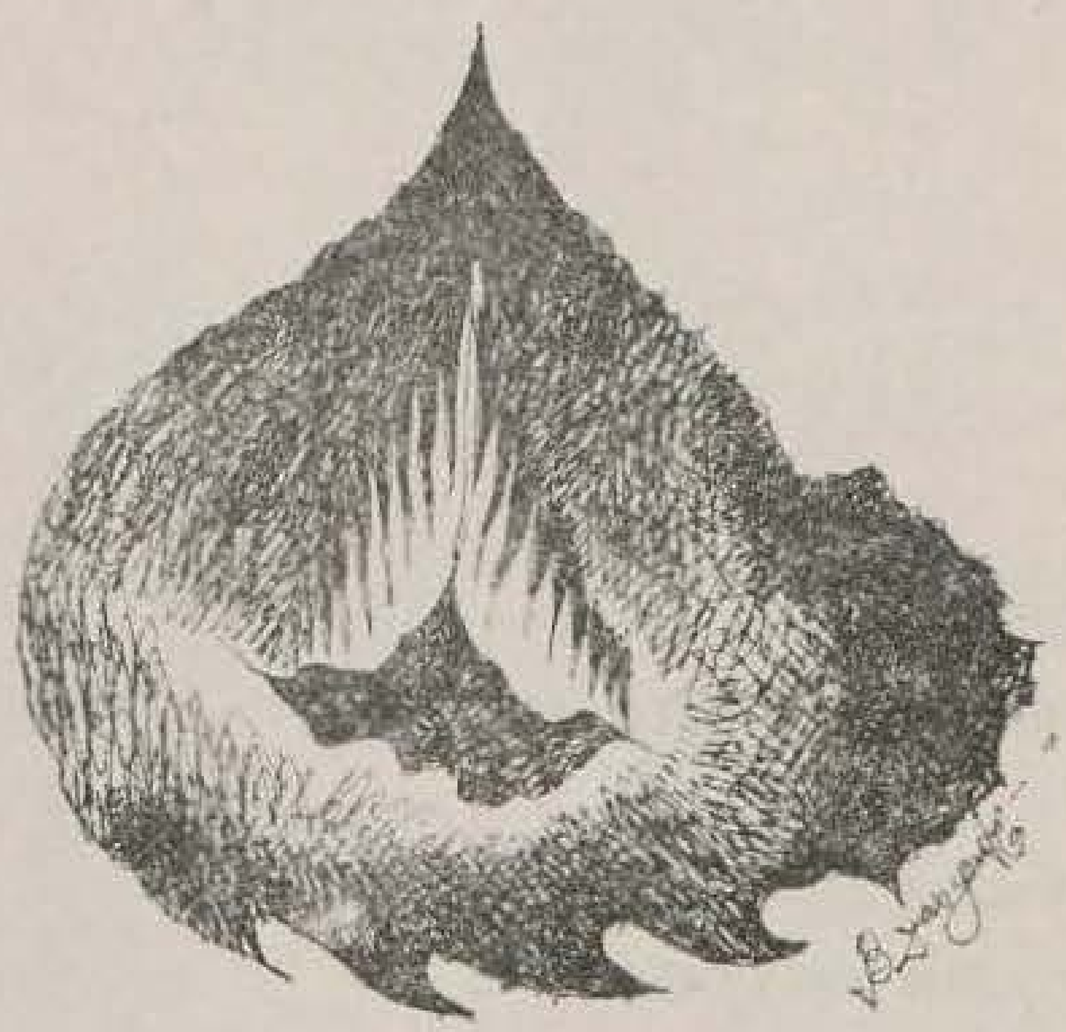
Meaning—II

Because common sense has meaning always blurred
And the outer shell of language obscures speech,
To signify now is to grope, moving backward,
Among concepts beneath the words, and reach

A clarity of values reassigned from trivia—
In disorder as living confounds the old barriers
Of being, as symbol and meaning develop myopia
And the horizon rears up short of sensed frontiers;

To signify now is to give meaning a figure,
Drawn with flexed rules of syntax, which says
What only you reflect in your metaphor,
As Arp: "The eyes would like to withdraw from the days."

Words in expressionist order each to each
Alone give speech a language's farther reach.



Permission

How easy it is to enter and then depart:
You don't need any permission.
But the interval is irksome
Permission is to be obtained if you would sit
or stand up.

The summer noon stays on
for a good look
Of the cringing figure of the powerful
It stands at a distance
And keeps laughing on.

Election

You are not ill at ease—are you—
If your servant enjoys right to vote
Exactly as you?
Wont that hoist up your liberalism?
And whom can your servants vote for
Unless for the liberal?
And the stones covered with moss of time
Roll on thus—
You may make sure and examine
Their hearts remain still
As they have always been.

Timid Time

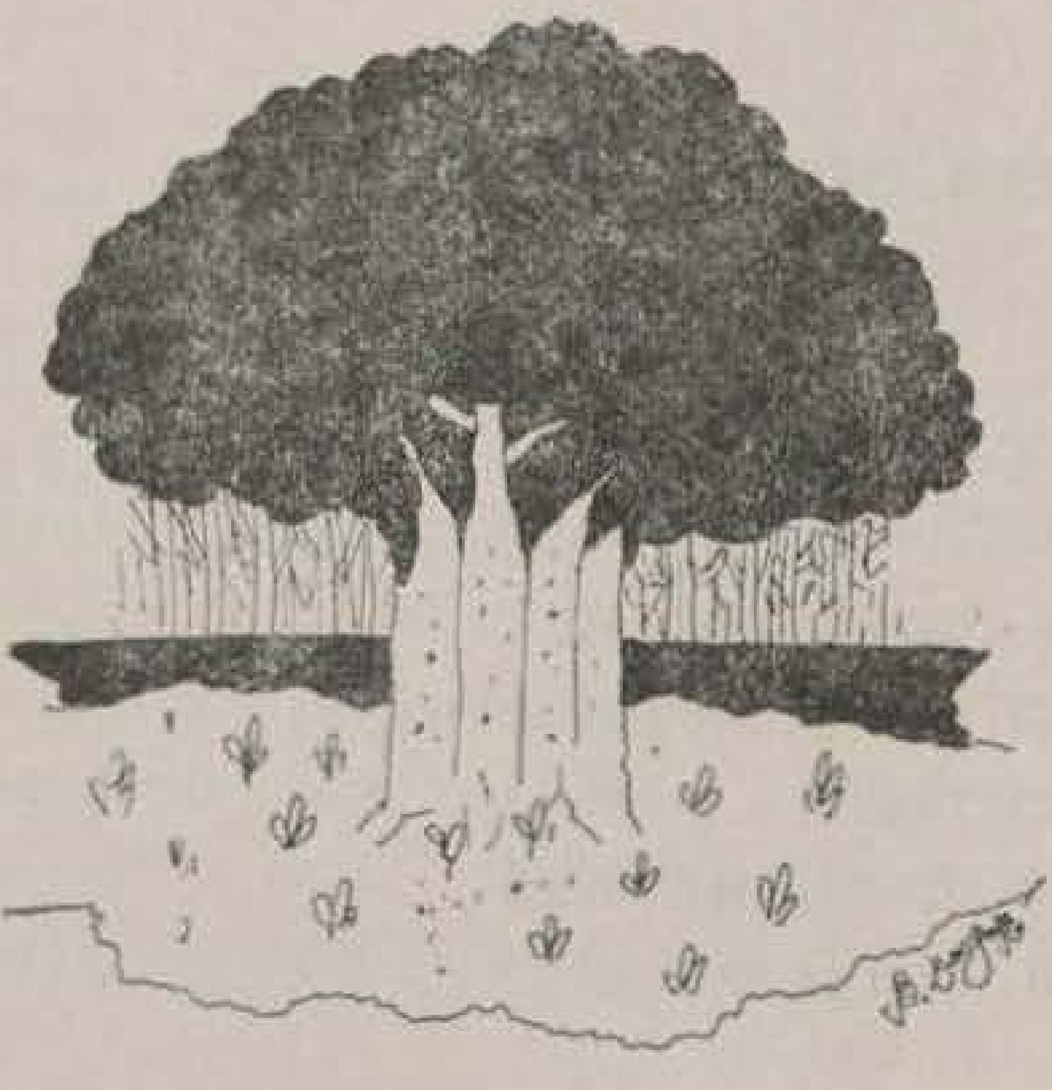
What a timid creature is time
It flies even before there's warning
And flies never to look back.
Have you closely watched, ever watched
How it stays and how it rushes away?
You are not worried at all
That night should follow the day.
A timid creature has found its shelter
In the shade of a tree.
Allow him his rest
Don't excite him
Don't terrorize him
He may turn fierce.

Let the Rains Come

The city roads are flooded but
to what purpose?
Why cry halt to the movement
to market places and places of work
to clubs and cinemas?
Why plaster the shoes with mud
even as the first step is taken
out of home?
Oh, the rains should not know
They are wanted in villages
Children must prepare essays

On nature during the rains.
Should not the peasants enjoy
prolonging their toils in the field
increasing production and
                    bringing down prices.
Let the country flourish
and villages become clamorous—
in rains, in floods and in starvation.
Let the rains come pouring down
in the fields, on the villagers
Let the waters swirl about
not here but there
Let the rains come pouring down
not here but there.

Tr. from Oriya by SHYAMAL SARKAR



GNANAKOOTHAN

Platitudes

Rose slowly
cleared throat
and began
the oration

Scratched a balding pate
and said
'Long live thee'

Tugged the table cloth
and said
'In this great land'

Tightened waist cloth
and declared
'Bereft of freedom'

Eyed womenfolk
and uttered
'Totally destroyed'

As I got up and left
I heard him say
'Our land our Bharat'

The last line
'To vivify us'
was let slip
through the window
onto the road
For pickers.

'Mahhan Gandhi Mahhan'

That was Another Day

A stray dog once
took umbrage under
a corpse, that rested
on four shoulders.

The eastern pall-bearer
kicked it in the belly;
It moved

The western pall-bearer
also took a shot,
It slunk

Then the southern pall-bearer
kicked it aside.
It shrank

And the northern pall-bearer
kicked it forward
so it chose

The centre,
far from four left feet
Thus provoked

All four left feet
hit out at centre
The shoulders dropping the weight

Underneath the corpse
hoisted up hurriedly
Stood the dog

Firm in his
middle umbrage.

'Anru Veru Kizhamai'

His Holiness

A mystic once meditated
and powers he got two
walk on water he could
and flame wouldn't hurt him too.

Walk the river he did
and the bitter stinging flame
felt on him like sandal
and people stared agape.

The mystic walked to the river
for an early morning bath
His feet just in, he froze—
no water touched his toes.

Self's purity ruined, he felt
a life's effort destroyed
Sweat came out of every pore
It corroded,burnt and tore.

A stranger found the stiffened body
and consigned it to flame
The mystic's corpse did not burn
And the stranger went his way.

With time's march his body too
has mouldered to the core—
Walk the wide river he could
and flame wouldn't hurt him too!

'Srilasri'

Tr. from Tamil by M. VIJAYALAKSHMI

No Regrets

The path along which
We walked together, proceeded further
Leaving us behind.
Stranded as we are midway,
Will you recognize us?
Part of us will slide into dreams
And with what is left of us
We shall get lost in shadows.

If part of us is still left
we shall give it away
For no worldy gains.
We are attached to attachment, to rhythm
we want to get entangled
Front and back, everywhere.

We have no wish to rise again
In anyone's memory.
We can easily mingle with the distance
Between yesterday and today
With the darkness
That is far, far away.

Let no trace remain
In the light that is to come
We would prefer the story
To end where it has to end.

'Kaifiyat'

Those Who Love

I like those
Who love someone or the other,
Love them more than early winter morn.
Morning means sunshine laden with dew.

I also like
The light emanating
From a tree, creeper or flower plant.
And even the colour of tender leaf
Mingling with the thorn.
For, the moment of love
Is like young *Kartikeya*
Small in size but his leaps
Infinitely high.

I am not referring to the kangaroo
With its empty pouch.
Yet, I like those
Who have loved for no reward.
Ila died seven years ago,
Leaving a note for Vidula:
"May you be happy now."

Truth to tell, she died for herself,
Suffocated with temptation hard to bear.
I am not praising either Ila or Vidula
I do not known them either.
Yet, for seven years I have grieved.

In seven years Ila would have
attained the age of reason.
She could have forsaken temptations of love.
I like those who can forsake not only the lover
But also love for the sake of love.

I believe in dying
Yet I like those who hover after death
In order to love.
The point is, what I disliked yesterday
I like today.

When You Come

When you come like rain,
A couple of birds
Sing from far and near
A wayfarer unknowingly gets drenched.

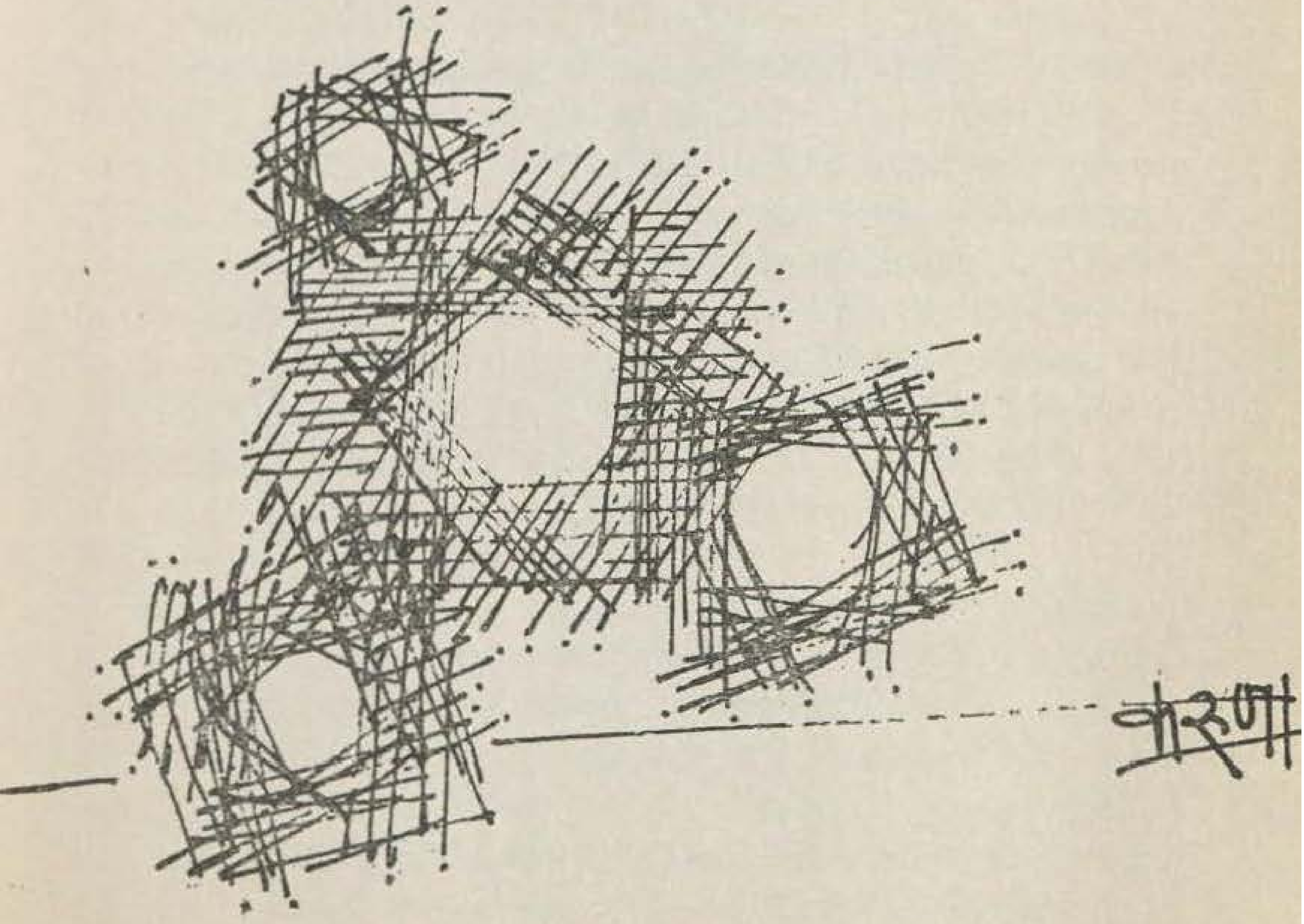
As the clouds stand still, the trees
Walk up to them or sometimes fly.
And here
The children and the street
Bathe at the same time.

When you come like rain
Someone raps at the deserted window
The dust that was there
Flows in the dampened sound.
When you come like rain
My inner chamber glitters with light.

'Tame Avo Tyare'

Tr. from Gujarati by SARALA JAGMOHAN

CRITICISM



Lukacs on Tagore : Ideology and Literary Criticism

KALYAN K. CHATTERJEE

"Tagore's enormous popularity among Germany's intellectual 'elite' is one of the cultural scandals occurring with ever greater intensity again and again—a typical sign of the cultural dissolution facing this 'intellectual elite' "—so wrote George Lukacs in a review of Tagore's *The Home and the World* (*Ghare-Baire*) in 1922. This article, titled as "Tagore's Gandhi Novel" is only one of nineteen such review articles contributed by Lukacs to the German periodical *Die Rote Fahne* in that year. An English translation of these nineteen articles has been available for some years in a book form : *Reviews and Articles*, translated by Peter Palmer (London : Merlin Press, 1978)*. Together these articles represent a considerable body of applied Marxist criticism. Tagore, however, is the only non-European author to figure here.

Lukacs, to be sure, was never an "official" Marxist critic. His judgement on Tagore too is not shared by Russian critics. In a recent visit to Calcutta, a Russian Tagore scholar, Alexander P. Danielschuk, extolled the merits of *The Home and the World*, particularly for its ideological stance against terrorist politics, and dubbed Lukacs' critique of Tagore as an

*Quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from this book.

example of "vulgar Marxism" (reported in *The Statesman*, 13 March 1987). It is, however, not entirely beside the point to relate this new appraisal of Tagore by Marxists to a renewed appreciation of Gandhi himself and his philosophy of peace and non-violence in the Soviet Union.

The vituperative and prophetically forebiding note of Lukacs' article can be attributed to the characteristic style of Marxist criticism of that period, when the Bolsheviks had only recently been installed in power in Moscow and the great Lenin was still alive and leading the revolution. The Utopian vision of an imminent world-revolution was much more of a prospect in those days than ever afterwards.

But it is a bit difficult to swallow the description of the great Lukacs as a "vulgar Marxist". Until 1918, when he converted to Marxism, Lukacs was a brilliant young Hegelian. He brought to Marxism his very extensive reading in European philosophy and literature. Now regarded as an important ideologue of "Western" Marxism, Lukacs is undoubtedly a pioneering Marxist literary critic. By 1922, when he reviewed Tagore, Lukacs had already published his now famous *Theory of the Novel* and composed his equally famous *History of Class Consciousness*. It is with these books and his later *Studies in European Realism* and *The Historical Novel* that Lukacs established himself as one of the foremost Marxist critics of the world.

Yet we have this piece before us—"Tagore's Gandhi Novel"—with its polemical abuse and insensitive generalisations. Declared Lukacs in a fury : "Tagore himself is—as imaginative writer and thinker—wholly an insignificant figure. His creative powers are non-existent; his characters are pale stereotypes; his stories threadbare and uninteresting; and his sensibility is meagre, insubstantial." There is also in his words more than a hint of that unsympathetic suggestion that Tagore's Nobel Prize was a recognition of his service to the Empire. "The English bourgeoisie," continued Lukacs, "has reasons of its own for rewarding Mr. Tagore with fame and riches (the Nobel Prize); it is *repaying its intellectual agent in the struggle*

against the Indian freedom movement." (pp. 8-9, Parenthesis and italics as in the original).

A Hungarian by birth, Lukacs was, however, very German in his intellectual upbringing. His literary taste formed before he embraced Marxism. Did the chauvinistic pride of the central European powers rub off on him too? The suggestion is ungenerous to a Marxist literary critic of Lukacs' stature. Yet his pronouncements on Tagore reek with so much abuse and banter that it is difficult to credit him with cultural tolerance. His high moralistic reading of European literature—no matter how Marxist he was—made him vulnerable to that kind of attitude.

Lukacs came to literary criticism wearing two hats, one on the top of the other. The critical hat sat tight and safe on him when he was dealing with a European great, such as Dostoevsky, even though the ideological hat tilted it somewhat. Disregarding Lenin's contempt for Dostoevsky, Lukacs showed his very great admiration for the novelist, calling him "Russia's greatest writer" and "undoubtedly one of the very greatest figures in world literature", and that in spite of his "political bias", "inner contradictions", and "Utopian outlook" ("Stavrogin's Confession", pp. 44-49). And in the Tagore article, Lukacs is further emboldened by the company he has pushed the great Russian into to call his novel *The Possessed* as "counter-revolutionary" (pp. 10-11).

But he tacitly admits the detachability of the social theorist and religious philosopher from the imaginative writer so that Dostoevsky's "failure [as a social philosopher] was transformed into an over-whelming artistic triumph" ("Stavrogin's Confession", pp. 47). Lukacs had the same ideological quarrel with Strindberg and same admiration for him. Strindberg's failure was that bourgeois society appeared to him as "an unalterable 'fact of life'." He took rufuge in the Church, but "the inner truth and strength of his work will. . .survive." ("On the Anniversary of Strindberg's Death", pp. 14-15). Even the great Shakespeare must be subjected to an incoherent ideo-

logical drubbing : his plays "arose as reactionary, feudal, courtly compositions, so that the Puritans' battle against this theatre was by no means an uncouth philistinism." ("The Genesis and Value of Imaginative Literature", p. 72).

Lukacs therefore can hardly be viewed as making a monolithical approach to literature. A writer's being bourgeois, feudal, or reactionary, his being innocent of history and class struggle does not preclude his imaginative works being an artistic triumph over these short-comings and having inner truths of their own. No mellowed Marxist to-day will seriously question this argument, but in 1922, the heyday of the Bolshevik revolution, the mellowed Marxist was an unhistorical species. The fact is that Lukacs' conversion to Marxism had little effect on his literary taste, formed earlier. As a Hegelian Lukacs saw that great works of art had a dialectic of their own and embodied a creative struggle for inner truths and strength of conviction.

In the case of Tagore, Lukacs suspended his critical catholicity towards the European greats, in default of which he subscribed to a rather simple version of the parallelism between literature and politics. It is interesting to note that Lukacs' position on Tagore echoes very audibly the Comintern thesis on Indian nationalism, as declared in its first congress in Moscow (September 1920) just two years before his article on Tagore :

> Tendencies like Gandhism in India, thoroughly imbued with religious conceptions, idealise the most backward and economically most reactionary forms of social life, see the solution of the social problem not in proletarian socialism, but in a reversion to these forms, preach passivity and repudiate the class struggle, and in the process of the development of the revolution become transformed into an openly reactionary force. Gandhism is more and more becoming an ideology directed against mass revolution. It must be strongly combated by Communism.

Tagore's novel, published in 1916, was not influenced by the

non-cooperation movement of Gandhi in the twenties but by the terrorist politics unleashed by the Bengal partition movement of 1905, a watershed in Indian politics. It is in the character of Sandip, the rival hero of the novel that the new political type is represented. He is a stark contrast to the noble-souled idealistic hero of the novel, Nikhilesh, thought to be modelled on Gandhian ideals.

But Nikhilesh's social ideals derive from the biography of Tagore himself : rural service, education of villagers, idealistic but impractical economic projects, and effusive sentimentalism. The hero's belief in the goodness of the human soul, his insistence on personal generosity, his abjuration of violence and impure means to attain his objectives—all these and more make him the kind of person that Tagore and Gandhi appeared to be to the West. It is interesting to note that it is largely for these virtues, as represented by the life and opinions of the idealised hero, that the novel is being revalued in the West, particularly by Soviet critics, anxious to project their concern for peace and rejection of terror and violence as political weapons.

Lukacs' vehemence against Tagore derived, not only from the ideological content of the novel, but also from its form and techniques : the characters are stereotyped, the novel is tedious, "propagandistic" and "demagogically one-sided", the hero idealised and whitewashed, the opponent blackened and caricatured. The novel is not a novel but a pamphlet (pp. 9-10). If the Indian novel is to be judged by the same standards as European novels, then Lukacs' charges have an apparent truth in them. But the principles of European literature do not apply verbatim to non-European writings. Marxist criticism is inconsistent with its philosophy of class and history if it expects the realism and psychologism of European literature in an Indian novel of an earlier part of this century. Lukacs should have looked at the novel in its own historical perspective.

The Home and the World is by no means a Tagorean story

at its best and there is even an element of self-parody in it. The novel would indeed read as an absorbing story if Tagore had cut out much of those unending monologues. Then the triangle of human inter-relationship and conflict between the female ingenue and the two men would have developed its dramatic potential unencumbered.

As a political novel, its great merits are obvious to any one, but Tagore overloaded the novel with a style that belongs more properly to poetry. It is a poetising, idealising style with little real action or dramatic development. From beginning to end, the novel is strung on a high moral key. What sounds so good in his poetry and songs seems to be somewhat of a tedium in this novel. In the consciously attitudinizing narrative of the novel, few speak normally or realistically and the philosophic language is a shade too intrusive.

But the novel does have, quite undeniably, a dialectic of ideas, enhancing the interest of its socio-political message. And the form of the narrative is literally a dialectic, that is, an alternating series of monologue-like first person narrative by each of the three protagonists: the new woman, the Tagorean humanist of a syncretist faith, and the nationalist politician, whose egoism is as conspicuous as his patriotic fervour. By involving the story in this dialectic between the three forms of idealism, Tagore in fact advances the one close to his heart, that is the reconstructionist social action of the aristocratic idealist Nikhilesh.

The interest of the story lies in the conflict between Nikhilesh's idealism and the self-aggrandising nationalism of Sandip on the one hand, and on the other, in the inner conflict of the heroine Bimala with her divided loyalty, caught as she is between her loyalty to her unassertive husband and the attraction she increasingly feels for the articulate and assertive Sandip. But from beginning to end there never is any doubt as to which way the reader's sympathies should turn. The dialectical interest of the novel would have been

far more enhanced if the sympathies could have been equally distributed between the three characters with the reader and interpreter being free to draw his own conclusion. But that is not the way a poet writes his novels.

The style and technique of the novel is steadfastly attuned to communicate a mystic feeling and the sense of an immanent spirit in nature. Echoing the eloquence of the *Upanishads*, as also the English Romantic poets notably the ethereal Shelley, this Tagorean style is pervaded by the Hindu-Romantic and pantheistic celebration of the spirit-like presence in nature. The ethereal morning glory, the freedom of the sky, the mystery of the twilight, the fingers of light in the starry sky with their eternal call to the spirit, the animated flowers and leaves, the breeze, river and pond, all made so tremulously suggestive in his poetry, spill into his prose and captivate the reader. Here is a page from Nikhil's diary (in my imperfect translation) :

> After having written up to here, I was about to go to bed when the July cloud in the sky before my window suddenly tore open and through that opening a big star shone forth brightly. It seemed to be talking to me: 'so many relations are being broken and then formed again like dreams ever so often, but I am changeless and constant; I am the eternal lamp's flame in the bridal chamber, I am the perennial embrace of the wedding night.'
>
> At that very moment a thought came to my mind, as if filling my lungs from side to side. It is that my bride of eternal time was sitting still hidden behind the screen of the material universe. . .In the shifting mirrors of a thousand births and rebirths, have I not seen her image ever so often? Broken mirrors, mirrors blurred by dust! Whenever I say 'let me make the mirror my own,' 'let me put it inside a box', the picture recedes.

This mystical-philosophical style tumbles in ever so often in Tagore's prose fiction and nowhere so much as in *The Home and the World.* To a Western reader, this style is apt to seem vapoury. And when it comes to man-woman love, Tagore's language is so poetically, even pathetically innocuous that the novel is likely to appear as an elaborate pretence. But

no novel can be read out of its cultural context. The sexual reticence, the effusive style, the ornate manner pleased the Victorian taste of Tagore's contemporaries. It was a taste that firmly disapproved of naturalism. But when the novel is abstracted from its style and manner, it yields a very valuable socio-political document.

Lukacs drove his Marxist critical apparatus over Tagore with a vengeance, enjoying his deleterious trail all the way. But the political stigma he attached to Tagore now stands removed : Tagore's parody of political violence now receives praise from other Marxist critics. Russia's greatest writer, Dostoevsky, too failed the ideological test given to him by Lukacs. "The great question is why Dostoevsky, like so many great Russians, preached suffering ? Why did he see no other means of escaping injustices of (Capitalist or Feudal) society than a reformed Christianity" ("Dostoevsky : Novellas", pp. 49-50, Parenthesis as in the original).

Therefore the bottom line in Lukacs' poetics is that the artist must abide by the same question as the ideologist and the "understanding of man's innermost hearts", with which he credited Dostoevsky, is left out of account in his final estimate of him as a writer. With this inconsistent ideological approach he was hardly in a position to judge Tagore's novel in the right perspective.

Bankimchandra and the Subjection of Women : Kapalakundala's Destiny

SABYASACHI BHATTACHARYA

THE novel *Kapalakundala* (1866) has the economy of a syllogism and an analogous linearity of reasoning. The form of this work is not my concern here. The stage props from the old store-house of the Romantics are obvious. The 19th century Romantic tradition of Europe has left its mark on the preference for desolate land-scapes and nature uncorrupted by man (the beaches and forests on the Bay of Bengal), mysterious visions and auguries (associated with the deity Kali), the ancient and ruined city (Saptagram), terrifying figures that come out of the mist of occult rituals (the Kapalika), and above all the contraposition of the so-called 'natural' human (Kapalakundala) against creatures of society in the chains of social conventions and mores. I will take for granted these and the stylistic elements and concentrate on the ideational structure and the argument in this novel.[1]

I think there is an inner structure of ideas which one may get at by cutting loose from the narrative and looking at Bankimchandra's handling of some basic concepts. These

1. I am indebted to Malabika Bhattacharya who drew my attention to the "missing Chapter" in later editions of *Kapalakundala* (Part IV, Chapter I in editions from 1866 and 1881), and to Gayatri Chakravarti for her critical comments on this paper.

concepts are : (1) Society/Nature, (2) Free Will/Necessity, (3) the Woman in Wedlock/in Love out of Wedlock/in Free or Unattached state.

In the exposition of these ideas below the surface of the narrative, Bankimchandra explicitly uses three categories : (1) *Yogini*, (2) *Grihini*, (3) *Pranayini*. Thus Bankim posits three moments in the process of the individuation of women.

I

Kapalakundala appears before the reader (and the main male protagonist, Nabakumar) first as a *yogini* and the core of her personality remains that of *yogini*. This is put in many different words : she is described as a *banya-devimurti* (p. 20), *Sannyasini* (p. 38), *tapaswini* (p. 52, 57) and *yogini* (p.58).[1] She is not constrained by social norms. In her first encounter with Nabakumar she addresses him without any of the supposedly womanly reserve or social graces (pp. 18-19). Brought up in the wilderness by the Kapalika, she does not even know of the institution of marriage (pp. 31-32). Nor does she know anything of the material objects valued in human society, *e.g.*, she gives away the jewels and ornaments gifted to her to a roadside beggar as if she is discarding an encumbrance (pp. 51-52). In the middle part of the novel Kapalakundala, after marriage to Nabakumar, is shown in uncomfortable and tense transition from *yogini* to *grihini* (p. 58). She is teased by her sister-in-law that she remains in many ways a *sannyasini* (pp. 58-60). Kapalakundala sees no point in dressing up to please her husband. She goes about unaccompanied in the woods surrounding the ruined city of Saptagram, she goes out at night braving suspicious glances from the husband and his family, she talks freely to men she meets.

> She never felt constrained by the thought that for a young married lady to meet, unaccompanied, an unknown man at night was not

1. *Kapalakundala* 1881 reprint (all page citations, unless otherwise specified, are to this edition).

> correct; her conviction in this matter was unshakable; to meet someone like that was not reprehensible if the purpose of the meeting was not reprehensible—she believed that a man and a woman have a right to meet each other on the same plane as men associate with men, and women with women. . . (p. 106).

> Nabakumar found that Kapalakundala was disobedient to him in certain matters. Particularly, Kapalakundala, despite his instructions, used to go by herself at all times to all kinds of places; she behaved with people as her will dictated; what is more, against his wishes she roamed in the woods at night all alone (p. 110).

Thus Bankim sets apart Kapalakundala in showing her freedom from the normal social constraints on women in her quotidian behaviour. This leads inexorably to the moment of truth in her life towards the end of the novel. There are some passages among the last pages terrifying in their directness. Kapalakundala "turned her inner eye towards the whole world—and she saw no one. She looked into her heart, Nabakumar was not to be seen there in her heart . . ." (p. 119). "If I knew that marriage is slavery I would have never married" (p. 95). "Suppose I do up my hair, dress well, put flowers in my hair, put on ornaments. . .Suppose I do all that, with all that, where is happiness?" Her interlocutor, her sister-in-law, replies : "Tell me what is the happiness of the flower that blooms?" Kapalakundala : "Those who look at the flower may be happy, is that happiness for the flower?" (p. 59).

Kapalakundala was the *yogini* and is in a transition—never to be completed—to becoming a *grihini*. The contrast between the two moments is marked by the renaming of Kapalakundala as Mrinmayee in her husband's household (p. 58). In the process she almost loses her identity. In one passage towards the end of the novel she is asked " 'who are you ?' If a year ago (*i.e.*, before marriage with Nabakumar) . . .Kapalakundala had been asked the question she would have answered straight away . . . But now Kapalakundala had become a little like a woman of the household, and she was without a prompt answer" (p. 100).

In fact it is a little surprising in Bankim that the role of the *grihini* is by no means idealised in this novel. The only one who speaks of the conventional wifely duties is Kapalakundala's sister-in-law (Nabakumar's sister who, ironically, has been abandoned by her husband, a Kulin brahmin with many wives). She holds forth on wifely duties in a chapter entitled 'Enclosed' or 'Imprisoned' (*abarodh*). Here she is merely a foil to Kapalakundala who gets the better of her in the argument (pp. 56-60). As I have already said, Kapalakundala's encounter with society begins with her question, 'What is marriage?' (p. 31). Her interlocutor, the temple *Mohunt* gives the stock response of all good Hindus : "Marriage is the only way to *dharma* for women" (p. 32). Near the end of the novel Kapalakundala finds an answer for herself : "If I knew that marriage is slavery (*dasitwa*) I would have never married" (p. 95). Finally, in the last pages of the novel when Lutfunnisa begs of her to give up Nabakumar, her response is astonishing; nothing about wifely duties, the sacred hearth and home, the *dharma* of women : "Where shall I go if I leave my husband?" (p. 19). Thus Kapalakundala would never become a *grihini.* The other woman in the story, Lutfunnisa, could not be a *grihini* for she is forever banished from the Hindu world. She is destined to act the role of a *pranayini.*

Woman as *pranayini* is what Lutfunnisa stands for. Although born and brought up as a Hindu, when she appears before us in the novel she has been cast out of Hindu society. It is, incidentally, interesting that both the female protagonists are beyond the pale, one was an outcast and the other never belonged. Lutfunnisa has the freedoms of an outcast : otherwise it would have been scarcely possible to depict her energetically pursuing her object of love, Nabakumar. (Whether the quaint fictional contrivance that he is her former husband, is intended to lend sanction to her conduct or whether it is intended to make it plausible, is an amusing but trivial question). In the narrative the depiction of Lutfunnisa is remarkable for its stress on her freedom from social constraints—first, in her

conduct in the coterie of libertines in the Mughal court (part III of the novel) and later, after meeting Nabakumar, in the single-minded pursuit of love as she conceived it (part IV).

In the first phase she preferred her "freedom" to marriage (p. 66); nor did she love any one (p. 82). "She was not inclined to marry. She thought, when I can be a honey-bee skipping from flower to flower, why should I clip my wings" (p. 62). In the second phase, after her chance encounter with her former husband, there begins what she calls "the search for a heart" (p. 82). Lutfunnisa remains, however, a free agent making a deliberate decision to leave Agra, to settle in Saptagram, to make assignations with Nabakumar, and to remove Kapalakundala from her path. In all the moves Lutfunnisa makes she is the hunter, not the hunted. It is her own free choice even when she declares to Nabakumar, "I will be your slave" (p. 85). This pursuit gives a sense of purpose to her life and in contrast "Kapalakundala has no bond of love" (p. 123). Of all the protagonists it is Lutfunnisa who, through her actions, propels the story on to its tragic end. Thus the *pranayini* is not a passive object of the hero's love : she is an individual, a free agent.

What we have been talking about till now—the way Bankimchandra posits Woman in three moments, *yogini*, *grihini*, *pranayini* -suggests that a relationship is built between these concepts Kapalakundala was an *yogini* and becomes a *grihini*, although her transformation remains incomplete for she remains an alien in society. Lutfunnisa was at one time a *grihini* in Nabakumar's household and then his *pranayini*, though her love was destined to be unrequited for she has been cast out of Hindu society. Neither belong to the Bengali, Hindu upper orders and thus they are observers of that society from beyond the pale. Through Kapalakundala questions are posed which constitute a critique of that society : what is marriage, what is a woman's happiness, do ornaments bring happiness, where can a woman go if she leaves her husband . . . This is, of course, a familiar literary device, the outsider questioning the

basic premises of a given situation or institution or society. Credibility is lent to this device by the fact that Kapalakundala was nurtured outside of society, almost a *banyadevi,* a nature goddess. However, this is more than merely a contrivance to provide a mouthpiece for a critique of the subjection of women in society. It has some thing to do, I shall argue, with a deeper-seated concern of Bankimchandra : the effects of socialisation on the 'natural' man.

II

That brings us to the Nature/Society dichotomy posited in the novel very deliberately. Bankimchandra, long before he began writing the novel, had in his mind a clearly formulated theoretical question : if someone is nurtured outside of society how would he or she undergo assimilation in society? What would be such a person's attitude to society and its norms ? There is evidence that Bankim started thinking of this problem at least six years before this novel was published. His younger brother Purnachandra records that in 1860 while Bankim was working as a Deputy Magistrate at Neguan, Midnapore, he encountered a Kapalika who lived in the jungles near the seashore : this experience set Bankim to think of the following problem.

> If a woman from infancy to the age of sixteen is brought up by a Kapalika in the jungle on the seashore, if she gets to know nothing of society . . . if such a woman is brought into society by someone who marries her, then how will she change in contact with human society. . . .[1]

Bankim posed this question to Dinabandhu Mitra and Sanjibchandra, *i.e.*, Bankim's elder brother (to whom the novel was later to be dedicated). Sanjib's answer—that in course of time the woman would cease to be a creature of nature and

1. Jogesh Chandra Bagal (Ed.) *Bankim Rachanavali* B.S. 1963, Calcutta), Vol. I, p. 30.

become a part of human society—did not satisfy Bankim. "I sensed", writes Purnachandra, "that this answer was not in line with Bankimchandra's own line of thinking. Dinabandhu offered no opinion. Two years (an error : actually six years) later *Kapalakundala* was published." In that question the nucleus of the novel is to be found. That is why I think the Nature/Society dichotomy is a central theme in the novel.

That this question continued to exercise Bankim's mind is evident from another piece of writing (collected in 1876 in *Vividha Samalochana*) on Shakuntala and Miranda. An excerpt :

> Both are brought up in the forests; both excel in the enchantment of artless simplicity. The beautiful, simple, pure womanly spirit is distorted in the middle of society—who will desire me, who will call me beautiful, how a man's heart can be conquered, these are the desires and pleasures and distractions which spoil the beauty of that spirit like clouds that hide the moon. Shakuntala and Miranda have not been marked with that stigmata for neither of them was brought up in society[1].

Bankim goes on to criticise Kalidasa's Shakuntala as a shade less real compared to Miranda. "Shakuntala is simple but not without knowledge of social conventions (or manners). The evidence of this is her bashful conduct . . . Miranda is natural, not bashful . . . The conventions dictated by society are known to Shakutala, Miranda knows nothing of that" (p. 205). The "bashful cunning" of Shakuntala, contrasted by Bankim with Miranda's "holy innocence", is, of course, in part because Kalidasa's heroine was reared in the *Ashrama,* an established social institution though located in the forests.

The Nature/Society contraposition and speculations on the 'natural' human go back in modern European philosophical tradition to Rousseau. After him, although his notion of the 'noble savage' was dismissed as an unscientific stereotype, the

1. Jogesh Chandra Bagal (Ed.) *Bankim Rachanavali* (B.S. 1963, Calcutta), Vol. II, p. 205.

critique of society and civilization through the eyes of the savage mind remained a permanent legacy. In particular Rousseau's work *Emile,* published in the same year (1762) as the *Social Contract*, was very influential. The intellectual problem that initially set off Bankim to think of the theme of *Kapalakundala*, reminds us of *Emile*. But although Bankim's works contain many citations of Rousseau, there is none that I know of referring to *Emile*.

While the above theme was undoubtedly the starting point, the terrain where Bankim arrived was, as I have indicated, the critique of society through the eyes of a woman unused to the ways of society of the Bengali, Hindu upper orders. It is a society of a colonialised people in a half-way house towards a "Westernisation" that did not infuse some of the essential components of the Western civilization. In the 1880's Bankim, under the impact of Comtean Positivism, articulated his dissatisfaction with this society in a clearer fashion. More particularly, a clue to the theme of women's status in *Kapalakundala* is to be found in the essays published in the decade following the publication of the novel (essays collected in *Prabandha Pustak,* 1879). On the subjection (*adhinata*) of women Bankim observes :

> In all societies the women are backward (*anunnata*) compared to men; it is the selfishness of men which accounts for it; men are physically stronger, and they are therefore the doers (*karyakarta*); women are consequently subjected by physical power. Actuated by selfishness, men will attend to the upliftment of women to the degree that gives men pleasure; beyond that, not a whit. This is more true of our country than of other societies. Needless to say in ancient times women were under injunctions that subjected them for life. . . Then in the middle ages the decline in the status of women was more marked . . . Even the wage-earning servant maids have some freedoms, but the wife and the daughter and the sister had none.

On the prescriptions and proscriptions laid down by the "law-makers of society":

> They laid down, women must do this and that. Why must they? Answer: That will be good for men. . . Thus such a lot of fuss about women's chastity. A man lacking in that moral quality is not regarded as equally guilty. Actually there is nothing in the basic principles of ethics which can support the view that the unfaithfulness of a wife is a greater sin than a husband's. Both are equally sinful. . . .Yet in a man it is looked upon as conduct befitting a *babu* (*babugiri*), in a women such a fault. . . would make her the outcast of outcasts, untouchable as a leper. Why? For the pleasure of the man his wife's chastity is desirable.

On J.S. Mill's *Subjection of Women* :

> In his opinion, women and men are equal, therefore his endeavour was to remedy their superior-inferior relationship. How successful this will be is to be seen, but it seems that, if one pays attention to this development in Europe and America, this endeavour will continue for a long while.

The last excerpt is from the moving obituary written by Bankimchandra a few days after Mill's death in 1873.

Apropos of that, one should recall that *Kapalakundala* was published in 1866, two years before the publication of Mill's essay on the subjection of women, and about a year before the Reform Act in England was passed—when Mill was defeated in his attempt to have franchise extended to women. 1866: that was twenty-five years before the legislation of the Indian Age of Consent Act raising age of legal marriage to twelve years : that was fifteen years before an Indian woman first entered a University : and that was less than thirty years since the legal abolition of Sati in India.

This paper is not addressed to the question of the long-term continuities in Bankim's attitude to social reform, women's status, etc. It may be contended that *Kapalakundala* is "untypical" in that the womanly ideal held up for the edification of Bengali women by "later Bankim" reflected a different outlook. I do see a disjuncture between the writings cited above and the later works such as *Devichaudhurani* (1884) or

Sitaram (1887) with their standard formulae which bear a family resemblance to the *samskaras* that "early Bankim" had questioned. At the same time, I feel that the disjuncture is not all that deep, that these tendencies in later Bankim are prefigured as early as the 1860's in *Kapalakundala*. That brings us to the theme of Freedom and Determinism.

III

Kapalakundala is the story of a woman nurtured outside of society trying to comprehend that society, particularly her own status as a woman and a wife. I have argued that in the process there develops a critique of the subjection of women in society. One would expect a radical message as the outcome. There is none. Why ? That is a difficult question to answer (unless one resorts to the simple cant about constraints on the colonial intellectual or some other variety of crude explanation directly correlating existential conditions with an intellectual's individual thought processes). The answer perhaps lies in Bankim's conception of Free Will and Necessity.

Let us consider the fact that the two turning points in the story are crises precipitated by woman's act of disobedience. Kapalakundala disobeys first her father and then her husband. In the first instance, she defies the Kapalika, her adoptive father, and saves Nabakumar's life. The consequence of this disobedience is that she loses the garden of Eden where she belonged till then. The second turning point of the story hinges on her defiance of her husband. The husband would not have his woman moving about freely and going out at night, for these are against all social norms that man has created. Kapalakundala's disobedience leads to her death. Nabakumar's last question to her is whether she has been unfaithful. Of course she had not been unfaithful to her husband. That is clear from the narrative. But that is not the point. What is significant is that to Kapalakundala the question is irrelevant. To Nabakumar's cry from the heart

'why didn't you tell me that you were not unfaithful?' her answer is 'You had not asked me'. Neither the stereotype of the faithful wife nor that of the unfaithful wife in love with another man makes sense to Kapalakundala. She is unattached, free and therefore she is beyond Nabakumar's comprehension.

I have said that woman's disobedience is a crucial element in the novel. Disobedience is an element also important in many myths where disobedience symbolises freedom and the price of freedom is the fall from grace. One can readily recall the instances of Prometheus in Greek mythology, Adam and the Garden of Eden in Hebrew mythology, Sita and the *Lakshmanarekha* in Hindu mythology. It is not that Bankim consciously develops a parallel with that mythological archetype. But elements that mythologies contain impregnate the literary space in which the creative imagination operates : in particular this is likely to be true of Bankim when he is writing in the 1860's.

Now, why is disobedience crucial in the ideational structure of the novel? That is because disobedience is an act of free choice. This has a dual significance in the context of this novel : (a) A woman opting for a course of action of her own choice is an assertion of freedom, and (b) Beyond the gender question, is the freedom that inheres in every individual's disobedience of archetypal authority : this could be the father, the scriptural injunctions, social norms, etc.

The latter kind of assertion of freedom finds expression in the writings and actions of some of Bankim's contemporaries, especially his early contemporaries of the Young Bengal School. Among Bankim's own peers Michael Madhusudan Dutt's contempt for "Rama and his rabble" and admiration for the God-defying Ravana is, of course, a classic example; and in real life he became an exemplar of the intellectual virtues of disobedience and the price one pays for it. Placed in this social and intellectual milieu one begins to understand the significance of the theme of disobedience in Bankim's novel. In the traditional Hindu order man and woman have a pre-

ordained status in the family, in the kin-group, in the caste, in the society at large. It puts constraints on freedom, but it imparted stability to social existence and gave security to the constituents of society. This is an ideal type of order to which the ideal of individual freedom is the polar opposite. Exercise of freedom costs the individual the place he or she had in his or her social world. Bankim was acutely aware of the cost of disobedience or freedom. In this sense *Kapalakundala* is a parable.

There is a third sense in which the concept of freedom is central in the novel. Bankim raises the question, is freedom possible ? How free can the individual be ? This is the question of Free Will versus Necessity or Determinism. In a little known chapter that Bankim put in the early editions of the novel and discarded in later editions, Bankim encounters this question.

This chapter is a clumsily written homiletic piece totally out of place in the flow of the narrative. It can be read as a statement of the theory of tragedy—the inevitability that leads the two chief protagonists to a tragic end. Bankim refers to the inevitability of Fate in Greek drama, in Shakespeare, in the Mahabharata. But the chapter can also be read as a discourse on free will and necessity, on human freedom and historical determination or inevitability.

This chapter begins with a long quotation from J.S. Mill :

> Pure or Asiatic Fatalism, the Fatalism of Oedipus, holds that our actions do not depend upon our desires. Whatever our wishes may be, a superior power or an abstract Destiny, will overrule them, and compel us to act, not as we desire, but in the manner predestined. The other kind, modified Fatalism I will call it, holds that our actions are determined by our will, our will by our desires, and our desires by the joint influence of the motives presented to us and of our individual character (p. 90).

Bankim's own gloss upon this is that the co-called "destiny written on one's brow (*lalatalipi*) is merely an invention for

the self-delusion of the inert people." But Bankim accepts the conception of Necessity "which no human power can deflect from its path":

> I am not saying that the influence of Fate (*adrishta*) or some super-natural power makes us act in a certain way. Even an atheist may accept Fate (or Necessity). Events in the world are inevitable consequences of physical laws and human proclivities; human proclivities are consequences of laws governing physical and mental processes; therefore, Fate (*adrishta*) is the result of mental and physical processes; but since we do not know all about these processes it has been called Fate. Some readers may be unhappy with the denouement of this story. They may say 'This is not a happy ending, the author could have made it different.' The answer is 'Fate. Who can withstand Fate. The author is powerless. As we have sown in the beginning so shall we reap. To show it otherwise will violate truth' (p. 92).

This is how Bankim, while trying to distance himself from what Mill called 'Asiatic Fatalism', looks at the limits of Free Will under inevitable Necessity. In one passage Bankim writes that *adrishta* "in another form takes the names 'Fate' and 'Necessity' and has caused immense debates among European philosophers." (p. 91; in this passage he uses the English terms in quotation marks, transliterated in Bengali).

Thus Bankimchandra is acutely conscious of the limits of Free Will. Torn between the ideal of freedom of human action and the knowledge of Necessity, Bankim's is actually a pessimistic stance. I think his conception of the limits of freedom in this sense is one source of the melancholy that pervades the novel *Kapalakundala*. The other source of that melancholy is I think the solitariness of Kapalakundala. She is alone in a society alien to her—no longer part of the garden of Nature where she was reared, nor yet a part of human society into which she is thrown by the course of her life, nor in any meaningful relationship with her husband for her individuality is incongruent with the conventionally defined

wifely role. One is reminded of Erich Fromm, that freedom through individuation is also a growing "aloneness". And it may not be fortuitous that this has a parallel in the solitude of Bankimchandra in this country in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The Mind and Art of Saratchandra

R.K. GUPTA

"The role of a writer is not to indentify with the makers of history but with its victims." Albert Camus

About Saratchandra it is difficult to write with reserve. He is one of those writers who grow upon you like a habit or an addiction. His works are endlessly fascinating but defy facile analysis. They have a haunting, elusive quality more easily felt than accounted for.

The adulation Saratchandra received in his life-time from the mass of readership has not visibly subsided. But the intellectuals and critics who are arbiters of literary taste have accorded him at best a grudging admiration, condescending to him when they do not disparage him outright—an attitude shared by many who walk in their shadow without overtly accepting their orthodoxies.

Saratchandra, these critics tell us, lacked a clear understanding of economic and historical forces which made him present his characters in a vacuum, without solidly grounding them in the material forces which essentially make a person what he is. Saratchandra was a conservative at heart, averse to change, and emotionally committed to traditional middle-class values. Although sympathetic to the exploited and the oppressed, he stopped short of suggesting remedial action,

thus exhibiting a deficient social consciousness. Incredibly naive and romantic in his attitude towards women, he set them up on a high pedestal and adored them from a distance without trying to improve their plight. His portraits of women are therefore often marred by sentimentality, while his male protagonists remain perpetual adolescents, failing to grow up intellectually even as they do physically.

And yet Saratchandra is, in my judgement, one of the greatest writers of fiction of all times. On what grounds can such a claim be made and defended? What is the distinctive nature of his genius, and to what can we attribute his greatness?

I

To begin with, Saratchandra was a born storyteller. He could tell a story that would hold children from play and old men from the chimney corner. It is difficult to take up *Mahesh*, *Ramer Sumati*, or *Datta*, or the widely acclaimed *Devdas*, and lay it down before one has reached the end. He opts for a selection and sequencing of events in which the interplay of characters brings out their full dramatic effectiveness. The finely graduated steps through which Digambari creates a rift between Narayani and Ram in *Ramer Sumati* or through which Gokul's wife and her father bring about an estrangement between Gokul and his stepmother Bhabani in *Baikunther Will*, or the see-saw pattern of attraction and seeming repulsion between Vijaya and Narendra in *Datta* are handled with consummate skill. The best among Saratchandra's stories and novels are exquisitely chiselled, delicately sculpted works of art; unified, concentrated, and immaculately structured.

Saratchandra was a master of dialogue and had a Mark Twain-like talent for reproducing, with finesse and fidelity, the subtle rhythms and inflections of everyday speech. The vitality and realism of his fiction derive considerably from his use of dialogue to bring out the delicate nuances of a situation.

The interchanges between Srikanta and Indranath (*Srikanta I*), or between the absent-minded Girish and his importunate wife Sidheshwari (*Nishkriti*), or between Ram and his sister-in-law to whom he earnestly expounds the difference between Ganesh and Kartik (*Ramer Sumati*) are marvels of expressiveness and economy. For presenting speech with delicacy and precision Saratchandra had an uncanny talent.

Saratchandra handles narrative technique with great sophistication. By using the omniscient viewpoint in most of his stories and novels he is able not only to comment authoritatively on a situation but also to delve deeply into the subconscious of his characters and bring to surface their repressed motives and feelings. In *Grihadaha* Achala is both fascinated and repelled by the turbulence of Suresh's passion, and the ambivalence of her response is effectively brought out through the agency of the omniscient narrator. The omniscient viewpoint similarly enables Saratchandra to suggest the full ramifications of Kiranmayee's infatuation for Upendra in *Charitraheen* and the factors behind Devdas's tragic disintegration. However, Saratchandra could also handle the first person point of view admirably, as, for example, in *Srikanta*, and in the little-known story *Balyasmriti* which hinges upon the impact on the narrator, a wild truant of a boy, of the central figure Gadadhar, a young cook who shows Job-like patience in suffering for the misdeeds of others.

In Saratchandra we find that delicate blend of tenderness and humour which distinguishes many great writers of the world. The tenderness may sometimes become mawkish or lapse into sentimentality but is usually tempered by the saving grace of a humour which laughs with rather than at people and which expresses itself through gentle irony rather than bitter satire. It is the co-existence of humour and pathos, of tenderness and sunny laughter, which is a salient feature of Saratchandra's fiction and produces the heartwarming quality of such stories as *Barididi*, *Parinita*, *Nishkriti*, *Ramer Sumati* and *Anupamar Prem*.

II

It is, however, in the creation of character that Saratchandra's greatest genius lies. In his fiction we find a memorable gallery of portraits and sketches drawn with great subtlety, sensitivity, and insight Although Saratchandra's male protagonists are generally complex and fully rounded characters, it is his women he is most emphatically remembered for. Perhaps no Indian novelist has presented a galaxy of women characters as remarkable as Saratchandra's.

The criticism that Saratchandra romanticizes and idealizes his women characters may have some basis but has been magnified out of all proportion To begin with, not all Saratchandra's women are romanticized or idealized. Those presented in a joint family context—Shailaja and Sidheshwari in *Nishkriti*, Narayani in *Ramer Sumati*, Gangamani in *Mamlar Phal*, Annapurna and Bindu in *Bindur Chhele*, Saudamini in *Swami*, and Bhamini in *Arakshaniya* are portrayed realistically and are true-to-life, down-to-earth creatures, free from exaggeration or stylization, plausible and totally convincing. Furthermore, although Saratchandra sometimes does put women on a pedestal, he shows full awareness of their great instrumentality for evil, and has in Gokul's wife in *Baikunther Will*, Kadambini in *Mejdidi*, Nayantara in *Nishkriti*, Digambari in *Ramer Sumati*, and Swarnmanjari in *Arakshaniya* delineated women who are selfish, heartless, and at times downright vicious. In *Harilakshmi*, Harilakshmi shows relentless cruelty in persecuting her poor dependent Kamala of whom she is inexplicably envious. *Sati*, a vignette of wedded life, shows how Nirmala's love for her husband Harish turns through excessive possessiveness a force for evil and ends up making life unbearable for him.

Although Saratchandra does not often deal with physical love, he presents in *Grihadaha* Achala's half-willing surrender to Suresh, while he shows through Kiranmayee in *Charitraheen* how love degenerates into sensuality. Thus Saratchandra has also exhibited the repellent side of women's character, an

aspect of the writer to which critics have not paid sufficient attention.

The veneration for women expressed in a Saratchandra work by a male character need not always be attributed to the author: it may simply be a device for delineating that male character. Even where a character is admittedly autobiographical (as Srikanta), complete identification of the writer with him is unwarranted. In fact, Saratchandra maintains a careful aesthetic distance from Srikanta, so that Srikanta's exaggerated reverence for Annada Didi may well be a device for bringing out the immaturity and naivete of an adolescent which he does not fully outgrow even as an adult.

In stories like *Parinita, Datta,* and *Chhabi* love has a happy outcome. But Saratchandra's major theme is forbidden and unfulfilled love. As Sengupta remarks in his brilliant and admirable study: "The one recurrent theme of his novels is love that is not sanctioned by convention." Many of his heroines are young widows who fail to find fulfilment in love because for them marriage is forbidden. More often than not, it is their own conscience rather than external pressure which makes them agonizedly renounce the object of their love. In *Barididi* the realization of her love for the erratic and unpredictable Surendranath dawns upon Madhabi very slowly. But finally she renounces her love and sends him away. Anupama (*Anupamar Prem*), Aparna (*Mandir*), Surama (*Alo-o-Chhaya*), Rama (*Pallisamaj*) and Neelima (*Sesh Prashna*) are all young widows who fall deeply in love, realize its futility, and ultimately renounce it. In fact, Surama goes so far as to have Jajnadatta, the object of her love, married to another girl. In *Dena Paona* Shodashi has to renounce her own husband Jibananda because she has become a Bhairabi, a priestess in a temple.

Among Saratchandra's most celebrated characters are his "fallen" women, women who have become disreputable in the eyes of society, either because they have deserted their husband for another person (Abhaya in *Srikanta,* Achala in *Grihadaha,*

Savita in *Shesher Parichaya*), or because they are in a profession society looks down upon (Rajlakshmi in *Srikanta,* who has become a singer), or because they have established a relationship society considers illicit (Kamal in *Sesh Prashna*, Kiranmayee in *Charitraheen*, Sarala in *Shesher Parichaya*). Many of these women (Kiranmayee is perhaps the sole exception) possess greatness of character. Rajlakshmi in *Srikanta*, for example, has justifiably become synonymous with nobility and sacrifice. Kamal-lata, Abhaya, and Annada Didi in *Srikanta*, Savita in *Shesher Parichaya*, and Savitri in *Charitraheen* show remarkable fortitude and an unusual capacity for suffering and sacrifice. They have a strong will and an exceptionally sensitive heart.

Around these characters a controversy has raged, and Saratchandra is said to have over-idealized them. Such idealization, it has been suggested, produces women who are in the last analysis a composite of what men want and expect from them. It is no more than another way of dismissing women as human beings.

Such a view rests on a misconception. Saratchandra shows not only unusual insight and sympathy but also great realism in delineating these women who are complex and plausible figures. Far from being subservient or ancillary to men, they are often the pivots around whom the male protagonists revolve, like satellites around a planet. The central character in *Grihadaha* is Achala, not Mahim or Suresh. *Srikanta* is Rajlakshmi's novel, not Srikanta's, who is completely overshadowed by her. These women are neither meek, submissive, nor docile. They are not passive but energetic, determined, and dynamic. In most cases they are intellectually superior to the men. They possess a militancy of spirit which prevents them from being even remotely like what men's stereotypes of women are traditionally supposed to be. Time and again, it is the women who give definition and identity to the men in Saratchandra's fiction, not the other way round.

Even when depicting women as embodiments of all that is good and noble, it has hardly been noticed, Saratchandra often

suggests the existence of a darker side to the character of many of them, usually concretized as a vague, ill-defined episode in the past which, however, does not fail to cast its ominous shadow on the present and which shows them as humanly vulnerable and fallible. What if not some weakness in herself made Sarala (*Shesher Parichaya*), widowed at eleven, enter into an illicit relationship with the unworthy Jeevan Chakravarty who later unceremoniously deserted her? Why did Savita in the same novel abandon her eminently worthy husband Brij Babu for the blackguard Raman ? A similar unsavoury relationship taints Vaishnavi Kamal-lata's past in *Srikanta*. How is it that Achala in *Grihadaha*, who loves and marries Mahim, succumbs to the fiery wooing of Suresh while at the same time recoiling from him in disgust ? Is it only devotion which ties Annada Didi to her murderer and rapist husband, or is it some dark subterranean force she can neither understand nor control? Far from being paragons, these women are flawed creatures, victims of their past passion for which their present suffering may be but a penance, not remote and sexless but tortured and tormented figures at the mercy of instinctual drives and primitive forces beyond control or rational apprehension. One may even suspect an element of self-flagellation in many of them. The past evil does not, of course, cancel out the present goodness and nobility of these women characters or make their large-heartedness and magnanimity less sincere. But by showing them as fallible Saratchandra makes them more credible.

Although many of Saratchandra's widowed heroines fall in love, their love does not culminate in fulfilment through marriage. This persistent refusal to confer happiness on a widow is at times taken to indicate the writer's ingrained conservatism. But in presenting, say, Rajlakshmi's and Kamal-lata's love for Srikanta, or Madhabi's for Surendranath (*Barididi*), or Aparna's for the young priest (*Alo-o-Chhaya*), not once does Saratchandra leave us in doubt that his deepest sympathy is with the lovers. Their love is shown to be fundamentally good and noble which illuminates and fructifies their

entire existence like a flood of sunshine. The lovers' failure to find happiness is presented as a great loss, as an enormous waste of the richness and bounty of emotional life nature endows human beings with. This sense of loss and waste is a paramount feature in Saratchandra's fiction and is brought out with the utmost emphasis at his command.

There can be numerous reasons why Saratchandra should not confer happiness on his widowed heroines, of which conservatism in himself seems the least likely. Since it was rare for widows to remarry and for the remarriage to succeed in the Bengal of his time, Saratchandra was actually portraying the situation as it was. Furthermore, the lovers fail to unite due not so much to external circumstances as to their own internalized traditional values—it is Rajlakshmi's own sense of propriety which prevents her from marrying Srikanta, not outside pressure. Saratchandra thus shows the unshakeable hold of social conventions on the human psyche, a hold which is extremely difficult to pry loose. Dramatic exigencies of fiction may also be behind Saratchandra's reluctance to show fulfilment in love, since obviously the theme of separation offers richer and more varied possibilities in terms of plot situations than the theme of fulfilment. Many great writers have testified to the superior dramatic possibilities of pain and suffering as a literary theme than those of joy and happiness. "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought," Shelley tells us, while according to Edgar Allan Poe, "Melancholy is . . . the most legitimate of all the poetical tones." Literary descriptions of hell are usually much more vivid than those of heaven, as in Dante and Milton, for example, for whereas suffering implies conflict, happiness leads to satiety, to the bland conclusions "And they lived happily ever after," which suggests a kind of dead end.

III

Incongruous situations arise when Western concepts, norms and literary categories are mechanically applied to Indian

authors and texts. There are many Indian authors—Kalidasa, Jayashankar Prasad, Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyaya, to name a few—to whom terms like tragedy and comedy, romanticism and classicism, do not apply. Are Kalidasa's plays tragedies or comedies? Is *Pather Panchali* a tragedy or a comedy?

A salient example of mindless application of Western concepts to the Indian situation emerges from looking for the Western norms of 'individualism' and 'love' in Saratchandra's *Weltanschauung*. In Western democracies, the interests of the individual are considered paramount, to which social and political institutions are subordinated. But in India while the rights and privileges of the individual are respected, he is considered part of a system which sustains and nurtures him. This, however, does not mean, as some Western critics—and their Indian followers, who surely ought to know better—have argued, that the individual in Indian society is substantially deprived of his autonomy by being subordinated to the "role" he is assigned to play according to the unalterable and hierarchically structured scheme imposed by his "dharma". The fact indeed is that in Indian society the individual is not encouraged to pursue personal aggrandizement with the kind of ruthless singlemindedness often admired in the West. His individualism is not unrestricted : it must operate within the constraints of the needs of the community of which he is a part and with which his interests are linked in many ways.

Thus it is that in Saratchandra we often find characters sacrificing their personal interests for the sake of larger social goals. This is also the rationale behind his defence of the joint family system which he regarded as a symbol and an instrument of social order. Among his most sympathetic and admirable characters are members of the joint family who, overcoming their personal interest, can "connect" in E.M. Forster's sense, and be, like Mrs. Ramsay in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, great "harmonizers," such as Shailaja in *Nishkriti*, Ghanashyam in *Swami*, Narayani in *Ramer Sumati*, Hemangini in *Mejdidi*, and Gokul and Bhabani in *Baikunther*

Will. In Saratchandra's fiction man's responsibility to family, community, and society is considered as important as his responsibility of himself. This is not a denial of individualism but a redefinition of it in a larger communitarian context.

On love also we find similarly contrasting attitudes. In Western literature love is often an impetuous, overpowering emotion which sweeps away everything along its path; and its success is deemed to lie in its fulfilment and consummation. In Indian literature, on the other hand, while the intensity and ardour of love are not diminished, the value of love is seen to lie as much in its feeling and experience as in its fulfilment and consummation. Whereas in Western literature love is a fierce, tormenting passion like the raging and foaming seas, in Indian literature it is rather like a stream which flows evenly and serenely but whose waters nevertheless run deep. Hence in many of Saratchandra's novels and stories the lovers decide to sacrifice and renounce their love for what they perceive as a higher good.

Moreover, whereas love and marriage are in the West largely the exclusive concern of the lovers, in India they have much wider repercussions and vitally affect the network of intricate family and community relationships, so that the final outcome of an affair of the heart may radically change the course of life not only of the lovers but of many in the immediate and sometimes even remote family and community orbit. Therefore, in choosing their final course of action, the lovers may well be swayed by social issues, and at times prefer renunciation to fulfilment, transcendence of selfhood to its indulgence. This sacrifice of the ego for a larger altruistic end is an ideal Saratchandra upholds not only for women but also for men, as may be seen in Srikanta, Gahar, and Vajrananda in *Srikanta*, Sabyasachi in *Pather Dabi*, Mahim in *Grihadaha*, and Bimal Babu in *Shesher Parichaya*. To be sure, the lovers are sorely tempted, time and again: but they often retain all this passion and fury under self-control.

IV

Saratchandra, critics say, shows little awareness of economic and historical forces, of the material base on which the structures of human consciousness are erected. What such critics forget is that a writer can, simply yet legitimately, choose to focus his attention on a study of human consciousness in all its delicacy and subtlety, and that many great writers, including Shakespeare and Saratchandra, have made this choice. To be sure, the material base may broaden the ambit of a literary work in certain cases : but it has never been a necessary condition of art. Saratchandra deliberately chose to focus his attention on human consciousness in all its mercurial elusiveness and to make it the object of his most delicate and intricate exploration, simply because it involved him most. His hallmark is depth, and like an excavator he digs deep and exposes layer after layer of subterranean feeling. In making such a probing analysis of the tangled web and delicate filaments of human feeling and emotion, Saratchandra has few equals in the world.

These probes, however, carry a value judgement of some sort. Soundness of heart, Saratchandra suggests, is more important than conformity to a rigid puritanical code. If one is compassionate and magnanimous, his more superficial faults may be forgiven, as are Jibananda's (*Dena Paona*) and Devdas's, who remain essentially sympathetic characters in spite of their drunkenness and debauchery. In *Charitraheen* the drunkard Satish is preferred to the self-righteous and puritanical Upendra. Failure and success, Saratchandra thus tends to suggest, are a matter of how we look at them. What commonly goes by the name of success in the world may often involve a ruthless pursuit of self-interest without consideration for the feelings and welfare of others. But those who lack enterprise and are indifferent to money may often turn out to be the most creative and zestful people. In *Srikanta III*, an enlightened villager tells Srikanta how the new mercenary culture has played havoc

with joy, which has fled with people who used to engage in unprofitable pursuits like singing and playing music and were regarded as wastrels and vagabonds.

Through his noble failures as much as through his "fallen" women, Saratchandra does not uphold traditional "middle-class" values : instead he demonstrates the full potentialities of human nature, its richness and complexity, and the warmth and compassion it is capable of. "Man's capacities," he seems to say with Thoreau (*Walden*), "have never been measured." His heroes and heroines—Srikanta, Mahim, Satish, Narendra, Ghanashyam, Nilambar, Devdas, Priyo Mukhujye, Indranath, Ramesh, Brindavan, Sunanda, Annada, Rajlakshmi, Kamallata, Savita, Sarala, Renuka, Aparna, Surama, Parbati, Bharati, Sumitra, Kamal—may be failures in the eyes of society but possess greatness of character, being unworldly, indifferent to social conventions, capable of great love and greater sacrifice, stoical and ascetic in their renunciation, strong-willed but self-effacing and magnanimous—in one word, "large-hearted." It is they who show us what human nature is capable of, what spiritual heights it can rise to, how rich and full-flavoured it can be. We bask in the glow and radiance of their nobility and are the better for knowing that such people can exist even if it be within the realms of a fictional universe. They have a redemptive quality and reaffirm one's faith in human nature. Meeting them in the pages of Saratchandra's stories and novels is as gratifying as it is elevating.

V

On the bases such as those stated above, one could make and justify large claims, the very largest, for the quality of Saratchandra's fiction and for his stature as a novelist. In his fiction he presents a selection of events, remarkable for their dramatic effectiveness, with a marvellous sense of sequence and climax. He creates a gallery of unforgetable characters who subtly work their way into the heart and imagination of the reader. Through

the interaction of character and situation he projects the theme of the transcendence of the ego. Not the indulgence of the self but its transcendence in the service of others—this is the lofty ideal held up in Saratchandra's fiction, an ideal propagated also by the great religious, philosophical, and ethical systems of the world. Behind most of the problems in today's world is the thoughtless savagery with which people apply themselves to their narrow and selfish interests. Saratchandra's fiction holds out a corrective to such forms of destructive and suicidal behaviour.

Saratchandra calls into question the norms by which society judges success and failure, and induces the reader similarly to question them. Like Mark Twain in *Huckleberry Finn* he reverses conventional values, turns them upside down, and forces a redefinition of such terms as good and evil, vice and virtue, success and failure. Thus the persons respected by society are shown to be bundles of egotism and selfishness—the two cardinal sins in Saratchandra's calender—while those condemned and rejected are shown to possess real human worth and dignity. Saratchandra upholds innate goodness and locates the true source of moral values not in the external world but in the human heart: "the heart of man," says Srikanta to himself, "is the seat of his eternal soul." At a time when writers seem to vie with one another in presenting man as a despicable creature—a beast, a dupe, a victim, a parasite, or a figure of fun—it is refreshing to read Saratchandra who shows man cast in God's image and capable of suffering and sacrifice for the sake of others.

It is unquestionably one of the great deprivations to readers all over the world that so few of Saratchandra's works should be accessible to them in reliable translation. The mass of reading public who has had access to his writings has always instinctively recognised his greatness as a writer. It may well be, then, that the common reader has shown greater wisdom and soundness of judgement in evaluating Saratchandra than literary critics have done. And we may, with Dr. Samuel Johnson, "rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common

sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinement of subtlety and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetical [and we may add literary] honours."

Saratchandra's best stories and novels generate abiding meanings, as relevant today as ever before. In essence, he doesn't deal with merely the timely or the topical; nor does he prescribe any solutions or answers. He rather deals with the issues of enduring and universal significance: human love and compassion, courage and fortitude, friendship and hatred, suffering and waste, and the like. What is more, his treatment of these issues, at its best, reflects infinite sensitivity of perception and extraordinarily controlled expression. This is essentially what makes him an all time great, one of those rare and luminous literary spirits who not only entertain and inform but also enlighten and illuminate.

Rewarding Studies

The Mahabharata and Modern Indian Literature
by Sitakanta Mahapatra
Ulloor Memorial Lectures. University of Kerala, Trivandrum.
1988, Page 39, Rs. 10

Kalidasa's Poetic Voice
by Umashankar Joshi
Vallathol Memorial Lectures. University of Kerala, Trivandrum.
1988, Pages 60, Rs. 15

Strictly speaking it is not right to consider these two lectures together. Their authors are two different persons, each defined by his own wisdom and persuasion, his own vision and perspective. Their years separate them too. Mr. Umashankar Joshi is approaching his eighties, a time of poise. This, one feels, is reflected in his lecture, marked by a total surrender to the theme, the self transfused into the currents formed by his development of the theme. Mr. Sitakant Mahapatra, younger by some twenty five years, does not attain this total surrender. There is in his lecture, a certain self-consciousness of his identity as a poet, an impetuosity in dealing praise, however deserved. The detachment and abstraction expected in considering an epic emerge in smaller quantities, making the conclusions smaller than the epic, not matching it in grandeur. One feels that the total satisfaction that an epic gives, the montage of the entirety of life that it affords, have to find an assonance and alliteration in the conclusions drawn by any study. Such correspondence seems a basic condition for the completion of the catharsis that even a commentary of the epic, as much as the epic itself, generates in the mind of the 'shrota' or receiver.

Inspite of such disparities between the two commentators, it does not seem unwarranted to consider their commentaries jointly, because their assumptions in their respective studies, are the same. Both assume that the Mahabharata and the dramas of Kalidasa have full relevance to modern times. This is the view of informed minds generally today, and since the full examination of this view is by no means over or past the first stages, it seems reasonable on the part of the reviewer to compare and contrast the grounds on which individual assumptions are substantiated, juxtapose them, and discover in them a common framework of reference.

In holding that the epics and the ancient classics have a contemporary relevance, what is really being said is that the relevance transcends time, that the works embody and illustrate the perennial metaphysic of life. The two commentators strive towards this final argument in their own ways. Mr. Mahapatra says: "In the growth and formation of life experience, space and time are perhaps not very relevant, and from that point of view, the life experience of a modern man is not very different from that of a man in the age of the Mahabharata."

This is not a very striking piece of reasoning, but very acceptable in the idea it expresses. Mr. Joshi goes about the task of illustrating the timelessness of Kalidasa's poetic voice in a subtler way. He says that the Bharatvarsha of Kalidasa is a figment of the imagination. The serenities of the hermitage that he describes in the 'Sakuntalam', the uprightness, steadfastness and grand rage of the rishis, were not the prevailing realities of Kalidasa's time These had already become memories, were already the past. What Kalidasa does, Mr. Joshi says, is to recall, resurrect and recreate the Bharatvarsha of the sages and sylvan retreats. Recall and recapitulation are, indeed, the hallmarks of creativity, Mr. Joshi points out : the greater the poet the more will he reach for the collective experience, the collective nostalgias and persistence, rather than limit himself to actual, lived experience. By recreating the Bharatvarsha of the Satya yug, or even the Dwapara

or Treta yugas when truth had more standing room, Kalidasa has recreated the essential Bharatvarsha, its ideals that have furnished the material for an Indian identity, and have given a sense of belonging or continuity to Indians of all ages. "Kalidasa has built his poetic universe from the stuff of ideals, aspirations, dreams, that were not fulfilled till his day or that even were yet to be fulfilled. And that is how it contains the quintessence of Indian culture and makes him the voice of the perennial culture of this land. . .by dint of his poetic genius (he has) given such an immortal form to India that nobody would ever feel exiled from it."

Another example of the gentle way in which Mr. Joshi lifts his subject above its given context and shows it as having its origins in higher values is his interpretation of the incident of the curse, laid by Durvasa rishi on Sakuntala.

The curse was not the utterance of a maddened impulsive man, nor a mere recourse to the supernatural in accordance with the dramatic conventions of the day, he says. It was a public declaration and indictment of the underlying character deficiencies of Sakuntala and Dusyanta. Sakuntala's deficiency lay in an isolationist involvement with the loved one, which impinged upon her duties as a member of a community. Her failure in attending to the needs of Durvasa was a breach of hospitality, considered a major domestic duty. Dusyanta's fault, in opposition to this, lay in an over involvement with public affairs to the point of insensitivity to individual specifics for happiness. As long as these deficiencies persist, the offspring from the union of the pair would not be the kind that ensures dynastic survival or public welfare. The need for such an heir was a motivating factor behind Dusyanta's amorous pursuits, Mr. Joshi points out: Sakuntala was not the first woman he had known. The suffering produced by the curse was meant to cleanse the two people of their spiritual shortcomings, and make them fit instruments for producing an offspring of the required calibre.

The two deficiencies of Sakuntala and Dusyanta serve to

define the concept of love in the Indian view, Mr. Joshi goes on. The love of a man and a woman, in this view, ought never to be centred upon each other, but ought to flow out towards realms where their individualities fade and merge in a vast, purifying anonymity. It is this ideal that Kalidasa holds forth in the 'Sakuntalam', Mr. Joshi says.

Imaginative interpretations of this sort, transcending the text, and reiterating the overall assumptions, are not quite there in Shri Mahapatra's lecture. The tone is a little more precipitate here. The observations are somewhat scattered, but arresting. He says, for instance, that Yashoda, Krishna's mother, was the archetype of one who beholds the wonderful, but cannot communicate the seen to others. Yashoda cannot convince others of the glimpse of the cosmic vision she has had in Krishna's mouth. Creative artists often find themselves in this situation, Mr. Mahapatra says. Something momentous in signalled within them and they can neither give expression to it nor release themselves from its spell.

This is without doubt an imaginative interpretation of Yashoda. But one wonders if Yashoda, indeed, was a frustrated woman, suffering from a failure of communication. One has the impression, rather, that she was a fulfilled woman, risen above the need for authentication and endorsement from fellow men and women, happy in her secret experience. Mr. Mahapatra, however, has touched upon a possible area of investigation here, namely, the effect of the projection of the cosmic vision upon the people chosen. Apart from Yashoda, Arujuna was the other person thus chosen, as Mr. Mahapatra points out. Can the stupefaction produced by the spectacle be analysed in modern terms? Mr. Mahapatra does not, as we said, go beyond the bare indication of the possibility of such inquiry. But even this bare suggestion is enough to make the epic come alive in our minds in a grand interaction of the personal and the universal. Reading the two commentaries, indeed is a rewarding experience.

RAJI NARASIMHAN

Tamas
By Bhisham Sahni
Tr. from Hindi by Jai Ratan
Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 1988
pp. 236, Rs. 55

The publication of Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* in English, is, no doubt, an important event in the world of Indian literature. It makes available to people at large a novel whose cinematic version provoked a heated debate when it was screened by Doordarshan, New Delhi. Fundamentalists of both the Hindu and the Muslim communities shrilly protested against the screening, alleging that the film would revive enmities of the partition period through its portrayal of communal violence which had rocked the newly-liberated India during the years 1947-48. The fact of the matter was that the film strongly indicted the fundamentalists themselves who duped innocent persons of both communities and generated large-scale communal violence.

This brings us to the significance of *Tamas* as a topical book. Its relevance is clearly ensconced in the issues it raises, issues of the communalisation of society and politics which are being tragically foregrounded once again in contemporary India. *Tamas* speaks up strongly against the politics of religious bigotry at a historical moment when fanaticism and separatism threaten to tear apart the fabric of our national unity.

However Bhisham Sahni's interpretation of events following the division of the country leans more on religious grounds than on historical complexities. This deprives *Tamas* a measure of tangled poignancy and richness, but makes room for a closer focus on how the religions frenzy worked itself out at the expense of people at large. Again, the episodes and the

points of view in this episodic novel remain broadly similar. This denudes the book of a possible multiple perspective on the situation, but helps the author to draw a number of concentric circles of experience and build up their cumulative effect. Mr. Sahni more than makes up for his limitations; but he does leave the threads of the narrative dangling on occasions, for instance whatever happens in the incompatible relationship between the Deputy Commissioner and his wife, or in the forced conversion of Iqbal Singh into Iqbal Ahmad.

Tamas, first and foremost, tells the story of ordinary people, caught in an extra-ordinarily tense situation and forced to play their pre-destined roles in it. Nathu and Harnam Singh, when they embody the narratorial consciousness, do not act; rather, they are acted upon by the social forces which they can neither comprehend nor control. They may not, in this sense, come alive on the pages of the book: but that is precisely how most people responded to the tragically swift onrush of those events. The whirligig of that historical moment kept confronting them with scenes of human savagery and compassion, greed and generosity, malice and nobility until a sudden but tautly conceived end comes in sight. The British administrators swing into action and halt the bloodbath. The finale may be construed as a perpetuation of the colonialists' myth of the white man's burden. But it, more appropriately, demonstrates that the British at worst connived with the crassly fanatical forces, and at best preferred to stand by. They prevented the bloody orgy only when it was too late.

On the whole, *Tamas* is a significant book, notwithstanding the fact that the gravity and magnitude of the subjectmatter it deals with asks for more. The translated version, however, is marred by scores of printing mistakes, leaving no doubt that the proof-reader has slipped up badly. Coming from the prestigious Penguin India it leaves much to be deserved. The translation by Jai Ratan, a veteran translator, has handed out a blend of the creative and the mechanistic.

TAPAN BASU

Experimental Phase

Two Rooms
Poems by Ajit Khullar
Vikrant Press Publications, Delhi
January 1988, Price Rs. 25. Deluxe Rs. 40.

A stark geometric design in grey on white is centered on the cover of Ajit Khullar's third volume of verse. Devised by the author, does it reveal the nature of the poems enfolded within or of the poetic personality which is their source? A reticent, fleetingly ironic voice sounds here.

This impression is offset by the writer's predilection for verbal experimentation. In his previous volume of poems, in a poem titled 'Delhi', the city's topography was visually enacted by the setting of words on the page—

r
i
v
e
fla r nks

That was an entirely novel kind of word-painting.

In the volume under discussion, Mr. Khullar's language has become sparer, moving ultimately towards minimalism in what he calls his 'vertebral poems' of 'defleshed syntax'. The first of these experiments is titled 'Dawn'—

multi-million
off-shovel
Coal
miners
Emerge
Bathed
Now-born

Baby
Pink.

Impossible not to be reminded of Japanese Haiku or of their progeny, the Imagist poems. Rabindranath Tagore too had produced some excellent Haiku-like poems in *Lekhan.*

In the remaining dozen 'vertebras' of Khullar, the juxtaposition of distant elements is more or less absent They present tiny facets of life observed—of Independence Day at Red Fort, of busy nest-building of sparrows, of bullock cart at night. Some, like 'Flukes', are only five words long. To use words as in a marble-tossing game is a poet's privilege. But can that bə the sole reason for the existence of a poem?

Delightful however are some feather-light poems, grouped under *Poems for Children at Playtime.* These are transcreations of children's poems from Punjab. They have the vigour both of the place and age of their originators. There in an amusing rhyme about a canny maid who keeps her master at bay till a gold ring is offered.

Ajit Khullar's poems take off from a point where a piquant analogy strikes him. In the title poem, 'Two Rooms', the two rooms of his house, in their different dispensations take on the features of his son and daughter in the eyes of their parent. Interestingly, Khullar's perception of his daughter—

Impressive
bespeak taste, look beautiful and rich

resembles Yeats' in his 'Prayer for his Daughter'.

But Khullar lives and breathes in his own environment in most of his poems. The sights, sounds, the people of his known world are caught in fragmented glimpses. Confidence and sureness marked Khullar's second volume *A Lone Bone on Fire. Two Rooms* shows the writer traversing a transitional, experimental phase. From a creative and curious voyager, future ventures are awaited with interest.

KALYANI DUTTA

Our Contributors

Authors :

SAMARESH BASU (1924-88)

Eminent Bengali novelist and short story writer. Was Founder Editor of *Mahanagar*. Published some 150 books including *Bibar*, *Prajapati* and *Svikarokti*. Received Sahitya Akademi Award for *Shamba* in 1980.

SUNIL GANGOPADHYAY (*b.* 1934)

Well-known Bengali poet, novelist and dramatist. Has written over 50 books including *Sei Samay* which received Sahitya Akademi Award in 1985. Associate Editor, *Desh* Calcutta.

ESHA DEY (SMT.) (DR.) (*b.* 1939)

Has published several critical articles. Teaches English at Government Women's College, Bhubaneswar.

PREMENDRA MITRA (1904-88)

Eminent Bengali poet, novelist, short story writer and film-maker. Published some 70 books including *Shreshtha Kavita*, *Anya Ek Nam*, *Kuyasha*, and *Ghanadar Galpa*. Received Sahitya Akademi Award for *Sagar Theke Phera* in 1957.

KISHORI CHARAN DAS (*b.* 1924)

Well-known short story writer in Oriya and English. His *Thakura Ghara* received Sahitya Akademi Award in 1976. Was formerly with Indian Audit and Accounts Service. Lives in Cuttack.

NIRMAL VERMA (*b.* 1929)

Well-known Hindi short story writer and novelist. His books include *Cheeron par Chandni*, *Har Barish mein* and *Dhalaan se Utarte huye*. Received Sahitya Akademi Award for *Kavve aur Kala Pani* in 1985. Lives in New Delhi.

J.P. DAS (*b.* 1936)

Poet and short story writer in Oriya and English. Some of his major works are *Pratham Purush* and *Anya Sabu Mrityu* (in Oriya) and *Love is a Season, Magic Deer & Other Stories* (in English). Lives in New Delhi.

RAJI NARASIMHAN (SMT.) (*b.* 1930)

Indian-English novelist, short story writer and critic. Besides a collection of short stories and a book of criticism, she has published three novels, the latest being *Drifting to a Dawn*, 83. Lives in New Delhi.

BULLEH SHAH (1680-1758)

One of the greatest Punjabi Sufi poets whose poetic compositions speak of his great scholarship, humanistic outlook and catholicity of faith. Wrote in Maji dialect of Central Punjab.

AJNEYA S.H. VATSYAYAN, (1911-87)

Eminent Hindi poet who has some 71 collection of poems to his credit. Received Sahitya Akademi Award in 1964 for *Angan ke par dvar* and also Jnanpith Award.

SHAMSUR RAHMAN FARUQI (*b.* 1935)

Well-known Urdu critic and poet. Has published a number of articles and six books. His *Tanqidi Afkar* received Sahitya Akademi Award in 1986. Is Post Master General, Patna.

RAKSHAT PURI (*b.* 1924)

Indian-English poet. Has published four selections of poems. Journalist by profession. Lives in New Delhi.

N.B. HARICHANDAN (*b.* 1946)

Oriya poet dramatest and critic Reader in Oriya at Visvabharati University. Lives in Shantiniketan.

GNANAKOOTHAN

Tamil poet. Has published two collections of poems. Was one of the founder member of the little magazine *Kachata thapara* (70's). Lives in Madras.

RAGHUVEER CHOUDHARI (*b.* 1938)

Well-known Gujarati poet, short story writer and novelist.

His works include *Tamasa* & *Gera Samaj*. Received Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel *Uparvas Kathatrayi* in 1977. He also writes in Hindi. Lives in Ahmedabad.

KALYAN K. CHATTERJEE (DR.)

Professor of English at Manipur University. Lives in Imphal.

SABYASACHI BHATTACHARYA (DR.) (*b.* 1938)

Has published a number of articles in scholarly journals. Professor of Economic History and Dean of Social Sciences in Jawaharlal Nehru University. Lives in New Delhi.

R.K. GUPTA (DR.)

Has written several articles on English and American literature. Professor of English at Indian Institute of Technology. Lives in Kanpur.

TAPAN BASU (*b.* 1935)

Recepient of pre-doctoral Fulbright-fellowship and visiting fellowship at Yale University, U.S.A. Teaches English at Hindu College. Lives in New Delhi.

KALYANI DUTTA (*b.* 1945)

Writes on Indo-Anglian literature and contemporary poetry. Senior Lecturer in English in Indraprastha College of Women. Lives in New Delhi.

Translators :

SWAPNA DUTTA (SMT.) (*b.* 1942)

A freelance translator. Has published books for children in English. Presently working on translations from Bengali poetry into English. Lives in New Delhi.

ARUNA CHAKRAVARTI (SMT.) (*b.* 1939)

Has published two books and several articles. Recepient of Vaitalik award on *Tagore : Songs rendered into English.* Senior Lecturer in English at Janaki Devi Mahavidyalaya. Lives in New Delhi.

MOHAPATRA, LEELAWATI (SMT.) & K.K. (BOTH *b.* 1954)
A husband-and-wife team. Leelawati writes stories in English and K.K. has published a collection of short stories in Oriya *Palabhuta*, 83. Both are with Income-Tax Department. Live in Bombay.

AJIT KHULLAR (*b.* 1937)
Indian-English poet. Has published three collections of poems. Teaches English at Dayal Singh College. Lives in New Delhi.

SHYAMAL SARKAR (*b.* 1936)
Reader in English at Visvabharati University. Lives in Shantiniketan.

SARALA JAGMOHAN (SMT.) (*b.* 1924)
Freelance writer and journalist. Has translated from and into Gujarati, Hindi and English. Lives in New Delhi.

M. VIJAYALAXMI (SMT.) (*b.* 1948)
Assistant Librarian at the Sahitya Akademi. Lives in New Delhi.

Artists :

BIMAL DASGUPTA (*b.* 1917)
Eminent Indian artist. Received National Award from Lalit Kala Akademi in 1956. Has held over 36 one-man shows in India and abroad. Earlier taught Art at the College of Arts. Lives in New Delhi.

ANIL KARANJAI (*b.* 1940)
Freelance artist. Has held many one-man shows at New Delhi, Bombay, Virginia (USA), etc. Lives in New Delhi.

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Cover : Maulana Azad speaking at the inauguration of the Sahitya Akademi; on the dais are S. Radhakrishnan, Krishna Kripalani and Humayun Kabir; in the audience are Ramdhari Sinha 'Dinkar' and Mahadevi Verma; New Delhi, 12 March, 1954.

Indian Literature

Sahitya Akademi's Literary Bi-monthly

No. 126: July-August, 1988 Vol. XXXI, No. 4

Dear Reader.

THE brith centenary of Feroz Bakhat Abul Kalam Mohi-ud-din Ahmad Azad, patriot, statesman and scholar, is being celebrated all over the country. Sahitya Akademi has a special reason to cherish the memory of Maulana Azad: he, more than any one else, was instrumental in its establishment. In 1947 the Government of India convened a series of conferences for establishing the National Academies. There was a sharp difference of opinion whether the Government should establish such Academies at all. Jawaharlal Nehru himself opposed the idea, he felt it would be considered an imposition from above. But Azad was able to convince Nehru that there was no alternative to the Government's taking the initiative in the matter. And the Sahitya Akademi was set up in 1954 as an autonomous institution.

In his speech at the inaugural meeting of the Sahitya Akademi, Maulana Azad said:

> What do we mean by an Academy? Is it a School? The answer is 'No'. Is it a Research Institute? Again the answer is 'No'. Is it then an Association of Writers and Authors? Still the answer is in the negative. If, however, it be asked whether it possesses the attributes of all of them. the answer must be an emphatic 'Yes'. By calling it an Academy, we refer to all these facets and signify that it is at the same time a School, an Institute, and an Association. If we were to call

> it a school or an Institute or an Association only, the full significance of what we intend would remain unexpressed. An Academy is, in fact, something more than any or all of them.

The Sahitya Akademi has been striving to live up to Azad's intentions. But, unfortunately for the Akademi, Maulana Azad passed away within four years of its inception. At the instance of President Jawaharlal Nehru, the Akademi undertook publication of the Collected Works of Maulana Azad, and seven volumes have already appeared. To commemorate the birth centenary of the multifaceted Maulana, the Akademi has already published a monograph and held a national seminar in August 1988, in which scholars from all over the country participated. Two of the papers presented at the seminar, one by A.A. Suroor and the other by Asghar Ali Engineer, are printed in this number as a birth centenary tribute.

This number includes, besides poems, stories and articles, a speech and an interview. The contributors come from the north, east, west and south; they range in age from the young Nepali poet Rajendra Bhandari, thirty-three, to the veteran K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, eighty. Opinions expressed in this journal, however, are those of the contributors and the Akademi need not be identified with them. In literary matters tastes differ and all that the Akademi intends in this journal is to provide a forum for various viewpoints.

As the new editor of *Indian Literature*, I shall continue the tradition established by my distinguished predecessors: Krishna Kripalani, Lokenath Bhattacharya, Keshav Malik and S. Balu Rao—and S.P. Jain who edited one issue in an honorary capacity. The journal wouldn't be what it is but for them and to them my grateful admiration, and to you dear readers my greetings.

D.S. Rao

The Literary Contribution of Maulana Azad

A.A. SUROOR

IN order to judge the literary contribution of Maulana Azad, one has to bear in mind, first, the man, and the range of his activities. Maulana Azad was a precocious child: at the age of sixteen, he was mistaken for his father, when he first attended the Muslim Educational Conference at Lahore.

Shibli recognized his genius and invited him to edit *Al-Nadva*, the journal devoted to Muslim learning. Before the appearance of *Al-Hilal*, he had already dazzled knowledgeable people by his *Lisan-ul Sidq*. *Al-Hilal*, and later *Al-Balagh*, brought Maulana Azad into the forefront of Muslim intellectuals. It marked the maturity of Urdu journalism. It portrayed the travail in the Islamic world, the growing anti-Imperialist feeling in the country, the tussle between the loyalists and the young Turks at Aligarh, the state of affairs at Nadva, information about literary masterpieces, and illustrated comments on significant events.

Maulana Azad was a man with a mission. Being steeped in traditional knowledge was not enough for him. Through Sir Syed, his doubts and questioning led him to a deeper understanding of religion and its place in life. He toyed for a while with the idea of a 'Party of God' (*Hizbullah*), he began

a new commentary of the Quran, in which he emphasized *Wahdat-e-Adyan* (unity of religions) and made a distinction between *Din* and *Shariah*. He was an orator par excellence and his writings also bear an unmistakable imprint of his rhetorical skills. *Al-Hilal* addressed itself to the Muslims but from the beginning it envisaged the unity of Muslims and Non-Muslims in their struggle for freedom.

When *Al-Hilal* and *Al-Balagh* both had been closed down, he was detained at Ranchi for more than three years. It was here that he completed a major portion of his Commentary on the Quran, later published under the title *Tarjumanul Quran*. Here he also wrote the *Tazkira*, the first volume comprising the history of his ancestors and a brief chapter in general terms about his youth. He plunged himself in the Khilafat Movement and the Non-cooperation Movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. During this period he was somewhat eclipsed by the flamboyant figure of Maulana Mohammad Ali. Mohammad Ali presided at the annual session of the Indian National Congress at Kakinada in 1923 and Maulana Azad at its special session at Delhi in 1924. Mohammad Ali drifted away from the Congress in the late twenties, but Maulana's association grew more strong and he had the rare distinction of being the President of the Congress for nearly seven years from 1940 to 1946. When he was imprisoned with other Congress leaders in Ahmadnagar in August, 1942, he wrote essays in the form of epistles to a friend, later published as *Ghubare Khatir* in 1946, after his release. Many of his addresses have also been published as *Khutbate Azad*.

So we can estimate his literary contribution through the writings of *Al-Hilal*, *Tazkira*, *Tarjumanul Quran*, *Ghubare Khatir* and *Khutbate Azad*. Some miscellaneous collections of his lectures and writings are also available.

Maulana Azad's religious and political thought has been ably analyzed by Ian Henderson Douglas in his book, *Abul Kalam Azad—An Intellectual and Religious Biography*, which has been edited by Christien N. Troll and Gay Minault, published

by O.U P. recently. A penetrating study of his *Tazkira* has been made by Prof. M. Mujib : *Ghubare Khatir* has been profusely discussed in Urdu. Malik Ram has edited with great scholarship all his works and so we can form a fairly accurate idea of his total contribution to Urdu.

Maulana Azad is above all a religious thinker. Though it is true, as Douglas has pointed out, that there is no systematic thinking in his religious writings and he did not complete his *Tarjumanul Quran,* yet his ideas have had an impact on the thinking of Muslims of his generation, and even after his death, though it is a pity that the short term political trends restricted this impact to some extent. Aziz Ahmad has pointed out in his book, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan*, that while Iqbal placed Man at the centre of the stage, Maulana Azad brought back God. I feel the remark is not fair to Azad who by emphasizing moral values, just society and understanding of Nature and evolution, echoes Sir Syed's earlier views. He also points out the need of *Ijtehad* Azad's religious man recognizes the contribution of other religions towards an understanding of the truth. He also addresses himself to all men in general and urges Muslims, in particular, to lead in the establishment of a just society. And his attitude towards modern knowledge is particularly forward-looking. While he is a severe critic of Western Imperialism, he urges his countrymen to imbibe western knowledge and particularly science. In a letter to Abdul Razzaq Kanpuri, he particularly mentions the need of more books on scientific subjects in Urdu. This letter was written about 1913. Maulana Azad has a greater awareness of the Vedic and Buddhist tradition. Douglas has summarized Maulana Azad's contribution by pointing out that first "he was both Muslim and Indian" and saw the two as mutually strengthening. Secondly, he showed the real relevance of religion and politics, and to all of life by opposing superstition and outward conformity, and emphasizing "right behaviour". Thirdly, he "was a symbol of the cultural response of the Muslim world to western hegemony," he exemplified the same

combination as Sir Syed, "of hospitality of western learning and devotion to Islam." Fourthly, his life had a very significant meaning through his advocacy of the co-existence of religions. This implied a "shrinkage in the substance of Islam", according to some critics, but if one goes deeper, it shows that Azad wanted men of religion to be closer to each other by laying stress on Islam and the best in other religions. In a way, he was ahead of his times, as he has himself said at several places in *Ghubare Khatir*.

I have so far emphasized the religious thinking of Maulana Azad in order to bring out the fact that the message is the key to the understanding of the literary artist and the stylist. It should be added now that from the beginning this religious thinking also carries with it a literary sensibility of a high order, steeped in oriental learning and particularly in Arabic, Persian and Urdu literatures, enriched in later life by his readings in English and French. He composed poetry early in life and showed remarkable facility of expression in it. He even consulted Shauq Neemvi who was his *Ustad* in poetry. He wrote in various journals like *Khadang-i-Nazar*, *Makhzan* and *Al-Nadva*, before bringing out *Al-Hilal*. Due to his wide reading and phenomenal memory he could bring to the notice of readers of his journal hitherto unpublished verses of Ghalib and new poems of Iqbal. In the pages of *Al-Hilal*, a style of prose gradually revealed itself which can aptly be called the "grand style". This style is characterized by an all consuming passion, a sense of mission, the touch of the alter-fire, a taste for metaphor, rhetoric at its loftiest and best, and an inspired and inspiring flow of sentences and phrases, with a rhythm which makes it akin to poetry. When Sajjad Ansari, a promising Urdu writer who died young, wrote that when he read Abul Kalam Azad's prose, he remembered God, he was sure that if Quran were revealed in Urdu, either Azad's prose or Iqbal's poetry would have been chosen for it, he was indirectly referring to this grand style. And Hasrat Mohani, well known for his ghazals and his insight into the secrets of

the Urdu language, paid a tribute to Azad's style in these words : "Eversince I have come to see Abul Kalam's prose, Hasrat's poetry has lost its charm."

Maulvi Abdul Haq, the great Urdu scholar and critic has criticized this style, because it is a deviation from the prose style of Mir Amman, Ghalib's Urdu letters, Sir Syed and Hali. I admit that there is some truth in this observation. Urdu prose, under the influence of Sir Syed and Hali, had developed a modern, forthright style, away from excessive use of Arabic and Persian words. Maulana Azad, because of his whole training and preoccupation with religious and philosophical themes and with his great interest in the social and political trends, in the Islamic world, could not help using Arabic and Persian words and expressions which aptly expressed his ideas, and were current in the Middle East and Egypt. So his vocabulary was richer in Arabic and Persian words than that of his contemporaries, but he was able to communicate his thought to his readers, first through his literary flashes, his impassioned language, his apt quotations of poetry and then his use of the art of repetition through various similes and metaphors. It must be remembered that Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, Abdur Razzaq Malihabadi, Maulvi Abdus Salam Nadvi and others imitated his style.

Nevertheless, I consider the style of *Al-Hilal* and *Tazkira* to be somewhat like that of *Nuskha-e-Hamidia* of Ghalib, which contains the seeds of Ghalib's greatness but the mature Ghalib is the Ghalib of *Diwan* Similarly the style of *Al-Hilal* and *Tazkira* has more of rhetoric than logic, more of passion than precision, more of the diffuseness of the oratorical flourish, than the density of the written word. When Maulana Azad speaks of his wild youth in *Tazkira* we know nothing except this fact. He confesses everything, but reveals nothing. In *Al-Hilal* the journalist is dominant over the thinker and writer. Minor incidents are elevated to a status of historical significance, there is more declamation than discourse. We soar on flights of fancy, and sometimes the hard realities of

everyday life appear dim and distant. But in *Tarjuman* and later in *Ghubare Khatir* and in some of the addresses in the thirties and the forties we see Azad's style at its best.

Coleridge has said this about a couple : on seeing a waterfall, the husband observed, "It is sublime", the wife remarked, "Yes, it is beautiful"; the husband had hit the nail on the head. The grand style of Maulana Azad has something of the sublime in it. In *Tarjuman,* we come across discussions about God, Man, Philosophy, History, whole scriptures, science, evolution and many other themes and subjects But Maulana is able to drive home his argument with a simile here or a metaphor there, and an allusion elsewhere. His commentary (*Tafsir*) of the first *surah* is his masterpiece. And his wide reading of Persian, Arabic and Urdu poetry occasionally clinches a point or closes an argument with an apt quotation. In fact in this respect Maulana Azad is a true index of the mental culture of his times. People won or lost a battle with an apt quotation.

I am reminded of an incident in the days of *Al-Hilal.* There was the move to convert the M.A.O. College into a University. Agha Khan was collecting funds for it. The Muslim community wanted an affiliating University. The British Government was prepared to allow a Residential University. Maulana Azad and Maulana Mohammad Ali both wanted an affiliating university, alongwith other young leaders. The loyalists opposed this move. It was decided to take a deputation to the Viceroy for the purpose. Both Maulana Mohammad Ali and Azad were against this and Mohammad Ali made an impassioned speech against the loyalists. But when he was quietly informed that he would be included in the deputation, he became silent. Maulana Azad then made a devastating attack on this betrayal and carried the audience with him with a quotation : *Mashooqe ma ba sheva-e-har kas muvafiq ast, ba ma shorab khord-o-ba zahid namaz kard.* (Our beloved adapts herself to the ways of every one, she drank wine with us and offered prayers with the ascetic.) Though Mohammad Ali also ended his reply with a quotation

he had lost the battle.

The ornate style of *Al-Hilal* and *Al-Balagh* has led many to believe that Maulana Azad always wrote in this vein. It is true that there is a change in Azad's style after *Al-Hilal* and *Tazkira*. This is first noticed in *Tarjuman*, then in his addresses and finally in *Ghubare Khatir*. As Malik Ram has rightly observed in his Foreword to the Sahitya Akademi edition of *Ghubare Khatir*, that "though he was addressing the Ulema mainly, yet it cannot be said that these ideas could not be expressed in simpler language." *Tarjuman's* argument, in spite of the special nature of the theme, runs fairly smoothly and it is interspersed with apt quotations from Urdu and Persian poetry. The addresses, on the whole, deal with a variety of subjects and the language is simple and yet it has a telling effect. But in *Ghubare Khatir* he is writing in a free vein and his imagination soars over a wide field. I would like to quote here some passages which represent Azad's style at its best and also bring out his idiosyncracies. The first is from his Rangoon address, and sums up in a nutshell his position about religion and nationality:

> I am a Muslim and profoundly conscious of the fact that I have inherited Islam's glorious tradition of the last thirteen hundred years. I am not prepared to lose even a small part of that legacy. The history and teachings of Islam, its art and letters, its culture and civilization are part of my wealth and it is my duty to cherish and guard them . . . .But with all these feelings, I have another equally deep realization born out of my life's experience, which is strengthened and not hindered by the Islamic spirit. I am equally proud of the fact that I am an Indian, an essential part of the indivisible unity of Indian nationhood, a vital factor in its total make up, without which this noble edifice will remain incomplete. I can never give up this sincere claim.

In spite of the repeated use of the first person singular, these memorable words coming out of a great soul are not merely Azad's declaration of faith, but have become the gospel truth for millions of Muslims in the country. The words flow

with a faith, conviction and commitment which moves the destiny of men and marks the horizons of history.

The second quotation is from Maulana Azad's address to the meeting called to erect a Memorial to Mahatma Gandhi in February, 1948:

> Gandhiji was a Hindu and remained a Hindu. But he had built such a high place for Hindu religion that when he saw from this height, all the disputes of the world appeared as resolved to him. Before him there was an open truth, which is not a legacy of anyone in particular, but like the sun and its rays, it belongs to all.

The third extract is from *Ghubare Khatir* :

> Philosophy will open the doors of doubt and then it would not be able to close them. Science will offer proof but will not be able to provide faith. Religion gives us faith, though no proof. And in order to live, we need not merely proven realities, but also faith. We cannot be content with things that we can prove and therefore accept; we need some such things also, which we have to accept, though we cannot prove them.

The next extract is also from *Ghubare Khatir*, about a newly hatched sparrow which could not fly, but suddenly soared into the skies:

> In this young one the capacity for flight had manifested itself. He had come out from his nest and was facing the sky and the space. But the feeling of self-realization had not yet awakened. He was ignorant of his own reality. The mother-bird was beckoning to him again and again. The breeze repeatedly brushed his wings. The tumult of life and movement was prodding him from all sides. But his own oven was so cold that no external zest could warm him.

Maulana Azad dedicated himself to the service of the people in general, and Muslims in particular. But unlike Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru and also unlike Mohammad Ali, he was

not a people's man. He remained alone on his Olympian heights. He loved solitude and was free with only a chosen circle of intimate friends. Sometimes he did not appear even human. When his wife died, he outwardly showed no grief, though inside he was completely shattered. When there was a talk of his courting arrest during the individual Civil Disobedience movement, shouting slogans, he replied sarcastically that "shouting slogans was vulgar." He lived all his life according to a strict schedule, was fond of his white jasmine tea and waxed eloquent about its flavour. I had met him several times in the last four or five years of his life. I never saw him laugh. Only once I heard him using an English word in his conversation and realized why in spite of good knowledge of English, he would never speak in English. He was not very generous in praise but was fair to people. He was a man of great grace and poise and always seemed to tower over the company in which he was. He never replied to his critics' calumnies and carried on unruffled and dignified to the end. Sometimes, there are some words and phrases in his writings which are not used today, but his writings remain the source of inspiration and guidance to the coming generations. He had a phenomenal memory, but sometimes this memory also played tricks on him. He was a man of great erudition and the string of verses which came to his aid, whenever he wanted to clinch an argument, was almost inexhaustible. The age of giants like Maulana Azad is over. His encyclopaedic knowledge, his love for the best in life, his taste for poetry, his sharp and penetrating intellect, his steadfastness in the pursuit of his mission, his view of life, politics, religion, public morality and his world-view will continue to inspire coming generations. In 1953, while addressing a Ghalib Day function, he said that some of Ghalib's ghazals and some of the *marsiyas* of Anees are Urdu's contribution to world literature. I may add that the first volume of *Tarjuman* and parts of *Ghubare Khatir* may also be included in this list. Satish Gujral painted a portrait of Maulana Azad for

Aligarh Muslim University in 1961. It shows a man, tired and slightly bent but composed and dignified, going on his chosen path, after wading through a river of fire. It seems that he is still proclaiming in the words of an Urdu poet:

> Keep the pointed edges of the thorns sharp, o wild wastes.
> May be, someone with blisters on his feet may come along, after me.



Theological Creativity of Abul Kalam Azad

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

NO Muslim has ever doubted that the holy Quran is a divinely revealed book though he may have differed from others about exact meaning and form of revelation. Yet, and it is important point to note that the Muslims have differed extensively from each other in their understanding of the holy book. No wonder, there have been numerous *tafasirs*[1], in fact as many as *mufassirun* (i.e. interpreters)[2]. Therefore, it is not wrong to maintain that the word of Quran is divine but not its interpretation. But here one difficulty arises. *Tafsīr bi al-rai* (interpretation of the holy book by personal opinion) has been condemned for the fear that the interpreter might go astray and may not remain faithful to the Divine Intention. Maulana Azad himself attacks *tafsir bi al-rai*[3].

But it is very difficult to completely avoid such *tafsīr* as human opinion does creep in. After all, every interpreter tries to guess the divine meaning. *Tafsīr bi al-rai* needs to be condemned at one plane so that an interpreter does not go very much off the mark. But having said this one must understand human limitations also. It is in this sense that individual opinion would always remain integral part of any *tafsīr* and it is this opinion which accounts for so many differences among the

interpreters themselves, however learned and pious they may have been. Again, it is in this sense that the Maulana's *tafsir Tarjumanul Quran* is outstandingly distinct contribution.[4] It is different from all other commentaries precisely because it has the impress of Maulana Azad's own opinion, vision and scholarship.

First, we will say a few words about theological creativity itself. What is the meaning of theological creativity? Is it similar to literary creativity or in any way different from it. Theological creativity makes any sense or not. Some people may reject it outright saying there is no question of creating anything as far as theology is concerned. It is predetermined, *a priori* set of divine principles.

In my opinion theological creativity is possible. It is both similar to, and different from, literary creativity. While it is similar to literary one in the process it is different from it in the sense that it has to grapple very seriously with the possible divine response to the changed human situation. The human situation is decidedly not static. It ever undergoes change. The God never ceases to create ever new situations. Allah himself says in the Quran: "He manifests Himself in yet another (wondrous) way every day (55 : 29)." Thus Allah keeps on manifesting Himself in ever new glory and more wondrous ways. His creativity, in other words, is not static. Iqbal, who was a poet and a creative thinker, maintains that man is co-creator with God. It is the highest status man can achieve.

What is theology after all? It is to strive to know about God and His guidance, the real intention behind the guidance. As God is creative, theology also has to be It grapples with divine intentions, His ever new ways of manifesting His glories and creation of new situations. How can then seeker after His truth remain stagnant and uncreative? A seeker after truth has to grapple with ever changing situations, understand His new ways of manifestations. Theology is nothing, if not rooted in a particular situation and also transcend it. It is this tension between its rootedness and transcendence that makes it creative.

Theology is both contextual and normative. It cannot scape either its contextualness, nor its normativeness. If it is not contextual it would be of no use to a people of particular age and area; if it is not normative, it would not only become supportive of *staus quo*, it would also fail to inspire humanity beyond one particular situation. Thus we see that creative theology is nothing but human response to a changing situation whose creator is God. The response, in order to be ever more meaningful, has to be dynamic. Thus one can see the relevance of creative theology.

II

Maulana Azad was brought up in a highly conservative atmosphere. His father was a practising Sufi but did not admit of any change, let alone any fresh approach to any problem. He was educated in this conservative atmosphere and had imbibed all the old values. It would be interesting to depict his early childhood atmosphere from his own recollections:

> My earliest recollection is of the aura of dignity and sanctity all around me and I found my family honoured and reverenced as if they were idols. While I was still a child, thousands of men used to come and kiss my hands and feet as the son of a pir. Apart from my family elders, any man I ever saw was bowing before me, over-awed with respect and homage. Extremely able and elderly men used to come and . . . sit with respect and homage just as I were in fact their idol. To every word that escaped my lips, no matter how worthless and meaningless, they listened with bowed heads and very great confidence and respect, and everything they responded, they responded with, 'Hear! Hear!' and 'Yes, indeed!'[5]

It required great effort on the part of Azad to wrest himself free from such a stiffling, suffocating and decadent atmosphere. Azad's intellectual struggle, in fact, began from his early childhood. He did not remain under the influence of traditional theology very long. He began to avidly read books and thus

came under the influence of Sir Syed's writings. This was a liberating experience for him. He idolised Sir Syed and even called him *mujtahid-e-mutlaq* (i.e. absolute creative interpreter).[6] His ambition was now to write in Sir Syed's style.

Sir Syed, it is interesting to note, was greatly influenced in his theology both by *falsifa* (philosophers, especially the Muslim philosophers influenced by the Greek thought) and M'utazila theologians. M'utazila theologians, it is well known, tried to develop a rational theology and many of their ranks had been influenced by Greek philosophy and thought. M'utazila theology, thus it would be seen, was the earliest attempt to evolve a creative theology under the impact of new situation then prevailing. Kufa, Baghdad and Basra were the cities during the Abbasid empire where Islamic thought stream freely mixed with other thought streams—Greek, Iranian and Indian—and thus created new challenges. Among others the M'utazila also tried to meet these challenges by using Greek tools and evolving a creative theology which, of course, could never develop popular moorings in the Islamic world.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was also being brought up in Calcutta which was then the British capital in India and thus had seen some of the modern innovations introduced by the British, the railways, the post and telegraph services, etc. Azad thus came increasingly in contact with, and under influence of, modern science and its concepts. He even planned a work on the new science and Islam. This influence increased to such an extent that at one stage he became an atheist, though outwardly he continued to follow religious rituals. Thus Azad says: "I was by now a complete atheist. I took great pride in my belief in 'materialism' and 'rationalism' and saw in religion only ignorance and conjecture." This period lasted from 1902 to 1910 i.e. from the age of fourteen to twentytwo.

Azad recovered his faith in 1910 when he wrote his famous essay on the noted poet Sarmad. This should be treated as a watershed in Azad's life. Azad, as pointed out earlier, had been brought up in a Sufi atmosphere and then he came under

the influence of rationalism and materialism. Though he came out of the later stage in his life it did continue to exercise some influence on his mind during still later stages of his thought. While Sufism imparted deeply humanitarian outlook, rationalism added to its breadth. His essay on Sarmad should be seen in that light. He writes:

> In his search for the goal, he (Sarmad) discarded the distinction between temple and mosque. Just as he bowed his head in humble respect before Muslim dervishes, so he showed faith in Hindu ascetics. Which person of genuine mystical experience would quarrel with this principle? If, in this realm too, we insist on maintaining the distinction between unbelief and Islam, what difference will remain between the blind and the clear-sighted? After all, it is the candle (as such) which the moth has to find. If the moth is in love only with the candle of the sacred precincts of Mecca, then its "seeking to be burned up" is imperfect. (Then he quotes a Persian couplet: The lover is ruined both by Islam and Kufr. The moth does not discriminate between the lamp of the mosque and the temple.)[7]

Azad further says, of whatever kind it may be, love (*ishq*) is always the first step towards the station of truth and reality (*haqiqat*) . . . or, better, love is the door to be passed through before man can become man. Whoever's heart is not wounded, and whoever's eyes are not wet with tears, how can he fathom the meaning of humanity.[8]

These words carry a message of universal love, the love of humanity, not of sectarian beliefs of whatever kind. Azad's latter theological writings must be seen in this light and in the light of newly developing situation during freedom struggle which required an alliance between Hindus and Muslims to drive out the common enemy, the British. Azad wrote his commentary on the Quran popularly known as *Tarjumanul Quran* during the period 1930-36. This was a very critical period in India's history of freedom struggle. The Tabligh and Shuddhi movements had driven sharp wedge between Hindus and Muslims. The first volume of *Tarjumanul Quran* was published by 1930, which means he was writing it through twenties which is

precisely the period when, after the Khilafat movement and the Chauri Chaura incident, the Hindu-Muslim relations began to sour and both the Shuddhi movement and the Tabligh movement intensified themselves.

Azad was writing in response to a situation. One's understanding of the Divine Word, as pointed out earlier, cannot but be influenced by one's situation. No wonder then that for Azad, during that period, the major theme of the first volume of *Tarjuman* was *wahdat-e-adyan* i.e. unity of religions. Another significant theme of second volume is equality of sexes, though it is not as major a theme as *wahdat-e-adyan*.

However, one should not think that unity of religions was taken up by Azad for the first time. Far from it. Shah Waliyullah, in the eighteenth century (1703-62), had also formulated this concept referring to certain Quranic verses, for example the verses 52 and 53 of Surah 23. The verses run as follows:

> And, verily, this community of yours is one single community, since I am the Sustainer of you all; remain, then, conscious of Me. But they (who claim to follow you) have torn their unity wide asunder, piece by piece, each group delighting in (but) what they themselves possess (by way of tenets).

Some other commentators were also conscious of the theme of unity of religions. Among them is Qazi Sanaullah Usmani Panipati (d. 1810) who wrote his commentory *Tafsir-e-Mazhari*. While explaining the verse 130 of Surah *An'ām* (The Cattle, chapter 6) he clearly says that the principles of Hindu religion are like principles of Islam but wherever there are differences it is because of Satan's mischief.[9] Of course many more such instances can be found.

But then what is the difference between Maulana Azad's and their approach? The difference is certainly not of approach but of emphasis. The Maulana, unlike other commentators, made it a major theme of his first volume. It mainly focussed on this theme and put maximum possible emphasis on it. It

was certainly a creative approach in response to the Indian situation, but certainly not limited by it. The new countries which began to come into existence in the post second world war period were mostly multi-religious societies and for these countries the theme of *wahdat-e-adyan* was of great relevance.

There was yet another reason. The Maulana was not only an *ālim*, a theologian writing commentary sitting in a room but also an activist, a leader, and in 1923 also the President of Indian National Congress. The Presidentship of this party had thrust a great responsibility on his shoulders. Indian National Congress was a secular party and it had to carry both Hindus and Muslims with it. Naturally as a president of this organisation Azad had to lay great emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity and the theory of *wahdat-e-adyān* provided philosophical and ideological ground for that.

In his address as the President of Indian National Congress in December 1923 he specially mentioned the need for Hindu-Muslim Unity. He said:

> This (i.e. Hindu Muslim Unity) is the first foundation of our (national) construction without which not only Indian freedom but also all those things which are necessary for living and progressing of a country are mere dream and empty thought. Not only that we cannot get freedom without it but without it we cannot even create elementary principles of humanity within us.[10]

Then he goes on to say :

> If an angel descends from high on today and declares from the top of Qutub Minar that *Swaraj* can be got within twenty-four hours if only India gives up Hindu-Muslim unity I would rather give up *Swaraj* rather than this (i.e. Hindu-Muslim unity) because if there is delay in getting Swaraj it would be India's loss but if we lose unity it would be whole humanity's loss.[11]

Thus we see from his Presidential address that Hindu-

Muslim unity was not only a practical necessity but also a matter of principle. He would not compromise on it even at the cost of the country's freedom. Human unity (*insani wahdat*) is more fundamental to him than the country's freedom which any way could not be denied. So the Maulana read *wahdat-e-adyan* into the holy Quran not only for contextual need but as a principle of theology ingrained in it. Also, while other commentators of the Quran referred to it, Maulana made it a fundamental principle of Quranic theology. It was for this reason that he devoted almost one volume out of four of his commentary for this purpose.[12]

Here we would also like to throw some light on the debate about context and principle of theology. Is it the contextual need which is important or the principle ? It should be borne in mind that neither the contextual need nor the principle can be ignored. The fact is that out of many principles (primary or secondary) one selects the one most relevant to one's own context. However, it does not detract from the importance of other principles. But it is a question of contextual need also. Here I would like to give an example. The major Quranic theme stressed by Ayatullah Khomeini and his followers in Iran during their struggle against the Shah and American imperialism was struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor between *mustad'ifun* and *mustakbirun*. Thus the verse 5 of chapter 28 wherein Allah talks of obliging the oppressed of the earth and making them the leaders and inheritors of it became of fundamental importance for the theologians of Iran led by Khomeini.

Here also, there was contextual need as well as a principle. Such highlighting of a principle in the light of contextual need cannot be termed opportunism in any case. It is, on the other hand, a creative application of the relevant principle of theology. As Khomeini and his followers (and also the Mujahidin-e-khalq-e-Iran who believed in Islamic socialism) stressed the importance of the rights of the oppressed of the earth in their context, Maulana Azad and his other theologian-

colleagues represented by the Jami'at-al'Ulama stressed the need for Hindu-Muslim unity and the principle of *wahdat-e-adyan*[13].

It is in this background that Maulana's creative application of the Quranic theology should be seen.

III

For Azad *Suratul Fatiha*, the opening chapter of the Quran, is the most significant chapter of the Quran. All basic concepts of the Quran are derived from this *Surah*. No wonder then that Azad devotes the first volume of his commentary to this small *Surah* which has in all seven verses in it. But each verse is pregnant with meaning. In fact, according to commentators, classical as well as modern, it reflects the whole philosophy of the Quran, of Allah's revelation.

In keeping with his philosophy of *wahdat-e-adyān*, the Maulana stresses the importance of the concept of *rabb al-'ālamīn* (nourisher of the whole universe). Throwing light on this Azad says:

> To visualise God as *Rabb-al Ālamīn* or the *Rabb* of all creation is to conceive of Him as not only the Creator of everything in the universe but its nourisher and sustainer as well. The provision that He has made for the sustenance and growth of everything is made under a plan, so marvellous that every being is furnished with all that its particular nature demands for its existence, and at the same time, it is furnished in a manner that takes cognizance of *every changing situation and need*.[14] (emphasis supplied).

Maulana is making two important points here and both are examples of his creative thinking and theology. Firstly, that Allah is *Rabb-al Ālamīn* i.e. one who sustains and nourishes the entire universe, animate, inanimate, everything included. Thus the concept of *Rabb-al Ālamīn* stresses not only the unity of the entire mankind but also the unity of the whole universe. Thus this concept comes close to the concept of *wahdat al-*

wujud (unity of being or ontological unity) of Muhiyuddin Ibn'Arabi. The Maulana's sufi background certainly influences his theological thinking. Secondly, he also stresses that *rububiyyat* also includes taking care of the demands of "changing situation and need". This is, according to me, an equally important concept. The theology must be related to the changing situations and needs. It is the quality of *rububiyyat* itself which is the quality of Āllah who is *Rabb-al Ālamin.* When every particle of this universe is equipped to meet the changing situation, why shouldn't theology be similarly equipped?

To further stress the point of change he says :

> Should he (man) look into himself, he will notice that his life, at every moment of its existence, discloses a world of activity propelled by the *Rububiyyat* of God. "On earth are signs for men of firm belief. And also in your own selves ; will ye not then notice them ?" (Q : 51 : 20 —1).[15]

Thus Azad includes in *Rububiyyat* the quality of change which is nothing but "world of activity propelled by *Rububiyyat* of God." This dynamic and universal concept of *Rububiyyat*, I would like to emphasise, is a creative contribution of Maulana Azad. No theologian, unless he is an activist and involved in a movement, can put forward such concepts.

Azad was no mere armchair theologian. He was, above all, an activist and his theology is also dominated by his activism, by the needs of freedom movement. In this respect he had his predecessors like Maulana Qasim Nanotvi who also stressed Hindu-Muslim unity and hinted that the Hindu Vedas may also be sacred books and Rama and Krishna may have been the prophets of God in their own time[16]. But Azad was unique in ascribing need for change and activity propelled by the *Rububiyyat* of God.

IV

Azad's creative theology embraced the domain of sexual

equality as well The question of woman's rights has assumed great importance in our time. There was no strong feminist movement during Azad's time. But Azad had realised the importance of the concept of sexual equality. The medieval theologians, on account of their own situation, had so interpreted the Quran that woman became subordinate to man. Severe restrictions were put on her which are still very much part of Islamic world today. However, Azad's creative theology struck a different path altogether. He became a champion of sexual equality and had no difficulty in finding support from the holy book. He quoted verses which were either ignored or much differently interpreted by earlier theologians.

Let us take the Quranic verse "And women have rights similar to those against them in a just manner"[17]. For Maulana Azad this is no ordinary verse simply referring to just treatment of women. For him pronouncement of these words was not short of social revolution. He says : The Quran by pronouncing these four words *Lahunna mithlul ladhi 'alayhinna* had made declaration of the greatest revolution of social life. These four words gave woman all that was her right but was never given to her (before). These words lifted her from the dust of deprivation and harshness (*shaqawat*) and seated her on the throne of *dignity and equality*[18]. Thus according to him these four words of the Quran were harbingers of equality of man and woman.

He further elucidates his point of view with reference to another verse which is really a unique and creative interpretation of that verse on status of man and woman. The verse can be translated as follows :

> Men are maintainers[19] of women, with what Allah has made some of them to excel others and with what they spend out of their wealth. . .[20]

Maulana Azad is of the opinion that man has been declared *qawwām* (maintainer, protector) not because of any inherent sexual superiority but because in those times the social structure

was such that he was the bread earner. The then social structure did not permit woman to earn. Thus the superiority of man over woman was a sociological, not a theological, matter. He says :

> It is obvious that this distinction does not give any superiority by birth to man; it is only a particular system of family life which has given this social status to him. Suppose, the family system of civilised people becomes such that the economic system comes to be dominated by women, then this distinction would be of hers, not of men.[21]

This very verse has been traditionally used to prove superiority of men over women. Almost all theologians have concurred with this view. But Azad, strikes a new path and makes a creative interpretation of the verse to prove that all it gives men is sociological, not sexual superiority. He goes on to quote other Quranic verses also to prove his point.

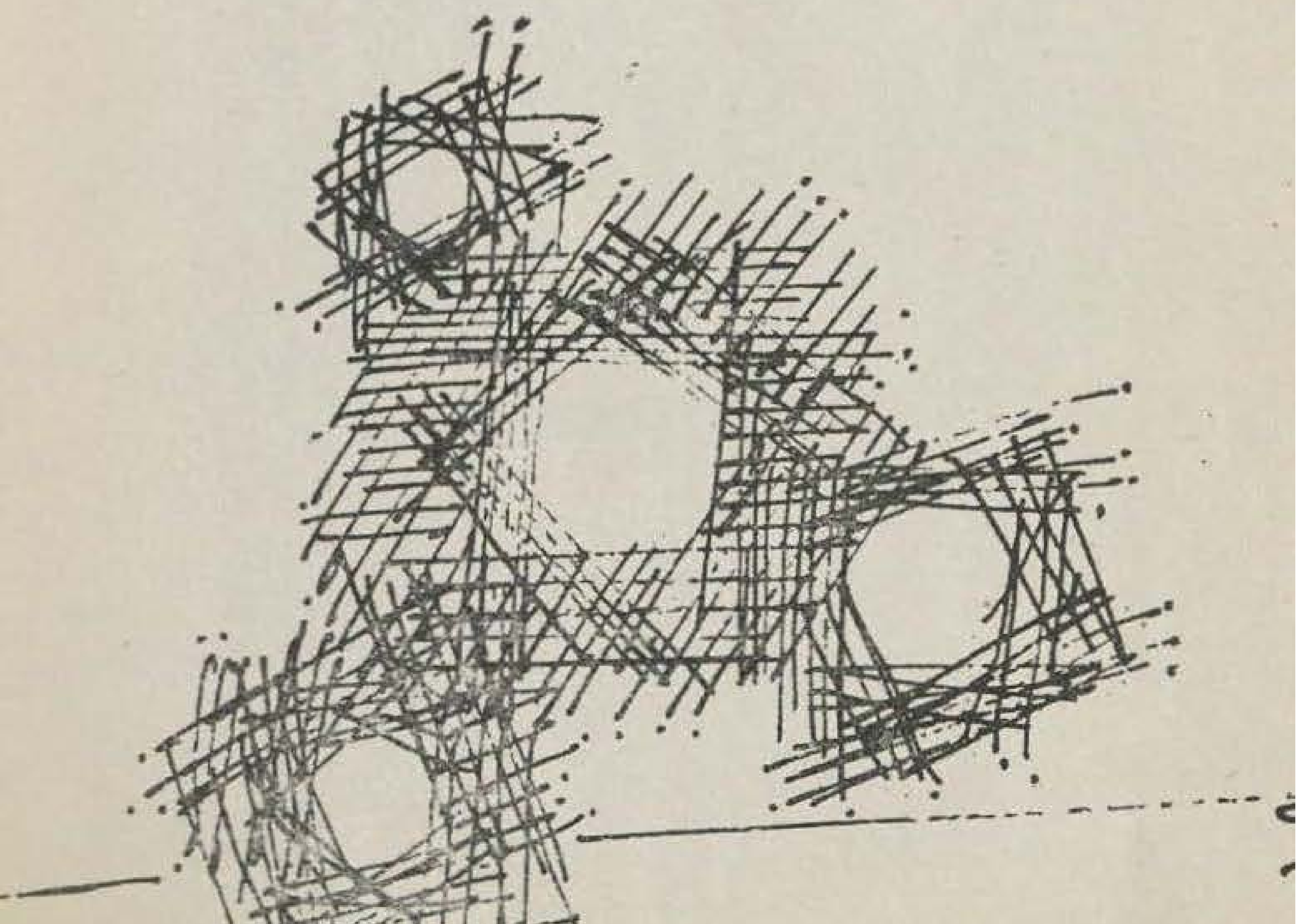
V

Maulana Azad was not only a creative thinker but also a stylist and a poet. His prose was no less creative than his thinking. He had basically a poetic imagination. Well, it may not be a sound quality for a theologian : poetic imagination may even become a weakness. But not with the Maulana. He remains as sound as any other theologian, though all may not agree with him. His research about *Dhu'l Qarnayn* also proves that he was not only a sound theologian but also a sound scholar. The Maulana was also a visionary. He did not confine Divine creation to a particular age or period, unlike other theologians of Islam. He believed in a dynamic, ever changing universe which necessitated creative application of the Divine Word in ever emerging new situations.

Notes

1. *Tafsir* (plural *tafāsīr*) means science of interpretation of the Quran.
2. See Asghar Ali Engineer "The Interpreters of the Quran", Occasional paper Vol. IV, no. 2 (February, 1988), Institute of Islamic Studies, Bombay. And also see Mahmoud Ayoub *The Quran and Its Interpreters* (State University of New York Press, 1984) Vol. 1.
3. Ian Henderson Douglas feels that the Maulana himself indulges in *tafsir bi al-rai* and considers it one of the weaknesses of *Tarjuman-ul Quran*. See Ian Henderson Douglas *Abul Kalam Azad—An Intellectual and Religious Biography*, ed. by Gay Minault and Christien Troll (Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 218.
4. Here all references would be to *Tarjumanul Quran* (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1980) and English translation of its first volume by Syed Abdul Latif, Asia Publishing House, 1965 reprint.
5. See Abdur Razzaq Malihabadi *Zikrr-e-Azad* (Calcutta, Daftar Azad Hind, 1960) p. 253. cf. *Abul Kalam Azad*, Ian Douglas, p. 49.
6. See editor's note 74 in *Abul Kalam Azad*, Ibid, Pp. 56.
7. Azad, *Sarmad Shahid*, Pp. 16—17 cf., *Abul Kalam Azad*, p. 228.
8. *Sarmad Shahid*, p. 14, cf., *Maulana Azad*, Ibid, p. 228.
9. Qazi Sanaullah Usmani Panipati, *Tafsir-e-Mazhari*, Vol. iv, p. 218.
10. *Khutbate Azad*, ed. Malik Ram (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1981) p. 205.
11. Ibid.
12. See *Tarjumanul Quran* Vol. 1 on *Sura-e-Fatiha*.
13. Of course, *wahdat-e-adyān* was the contribution of Maulana Azad but in the matter of Hindu-Muslim unity other Ulema were fully agreeable.
14. *Tarjumanul Quran* Vol. 1 Eng. tr. by Syed Abdul Latif, p. 20.
15. Ibid, p. 21.
16. See *Islam aur Firqawariyyat* by Qasim Nanotvi, cf., Akhlaq Husain Dehlavi, "Vedic Dharm aur Islam-Taqabuli Mutali'a", *Inquilab*, Bombay, 20th July, 1988.
17. *The Quran*, 2 : 228.
18. *Tarjumanul Quran* (Urdu) Vol. 2 p. 189.
19. "Maintainer" is the translation of the word "Qawwam"; many conservative theologians use this word to prove superiority of men over women.
20. *The Quran*, 4:34.
21. *Tarjumanul Quran* (Urdu) Vol. 2. Pp. 190-91.

Poems



DEBI ROY

The Dear Girl

Jenny, the cabaret dancer, just thirtythree,
tosses and turns against her dreamy pillow, excited.

All the way from her remote village,
in search of a missing husband?
The city has taught her she gets nothing until she gives!

Agreed! Now she carefully throws knives at her cousin—
Jenny, the cabaret dancer of thirtythree.

"I don't know, sir, what happened to the man—
it's only the other day.
The villagers were all starving; none could help me."

How long can one stand the confessional ghosts, tell me?
I've showered, eaten and slept enough;
now, surely I need something more.
Let's have a deal. Or else, burn in your hell.

Jenny wasn't bad, really, but now I know all the hassles.
They say even the touch of a tiger gives you sores.

"My dear girl, do you know
what spells happiness in this world? Money!
Forget the one who's gone. Let's strike a deal.
In life, money assures all. In any case,
you keep your bangles, the symbol of your marriage."

The Lover and Sleeping Pills

The lover has lost
the love of his life.

While you mouth polite, placid words
where do you hide, in which cranny,

all your sleeping pills in aluminium foil,
the long arm of the pharmacist?

Nothing, nothing is real anymore,
neither the dignity nor the illusion,
nor the treasured sleep.

The City that Lost its Head

The city that lost its head: they wreck you
and re-build you, to make you great and unique.
But does one touch others' hearts at all?

The halogen lamps are so bright even my imagination flags!
Even intimate relationships erode
Everyone speaks with raised voices.

Rude, querulous faces instead of a free-flowing life
I see vaulting ambition without a shred of dignity
and fawning politics shaded by evil.

I see gross passivity masquerade
as philosophicality. And I see casual contempt
in the pitiless eyes of those that succeed.

Who knows the right icon in this concrete jungle.
A rare voice or two protest the endless blunders;
I alone foolishly spring in rebellion.

In the city that lost its head
no one has time for anyone else.

A Man and His Shirt

A shirt hangs on the clothes-hanger,
a shirt, not a man.
And it is
not very special,
for it stains easily.

A shirt serves to cover up.
And a man serves
to disclose little more.
He knows well
he must put a lock to his lips.

Is this the gravity that comes with age?
Men crave a spurious solemnity,
the mask of the fatuous.

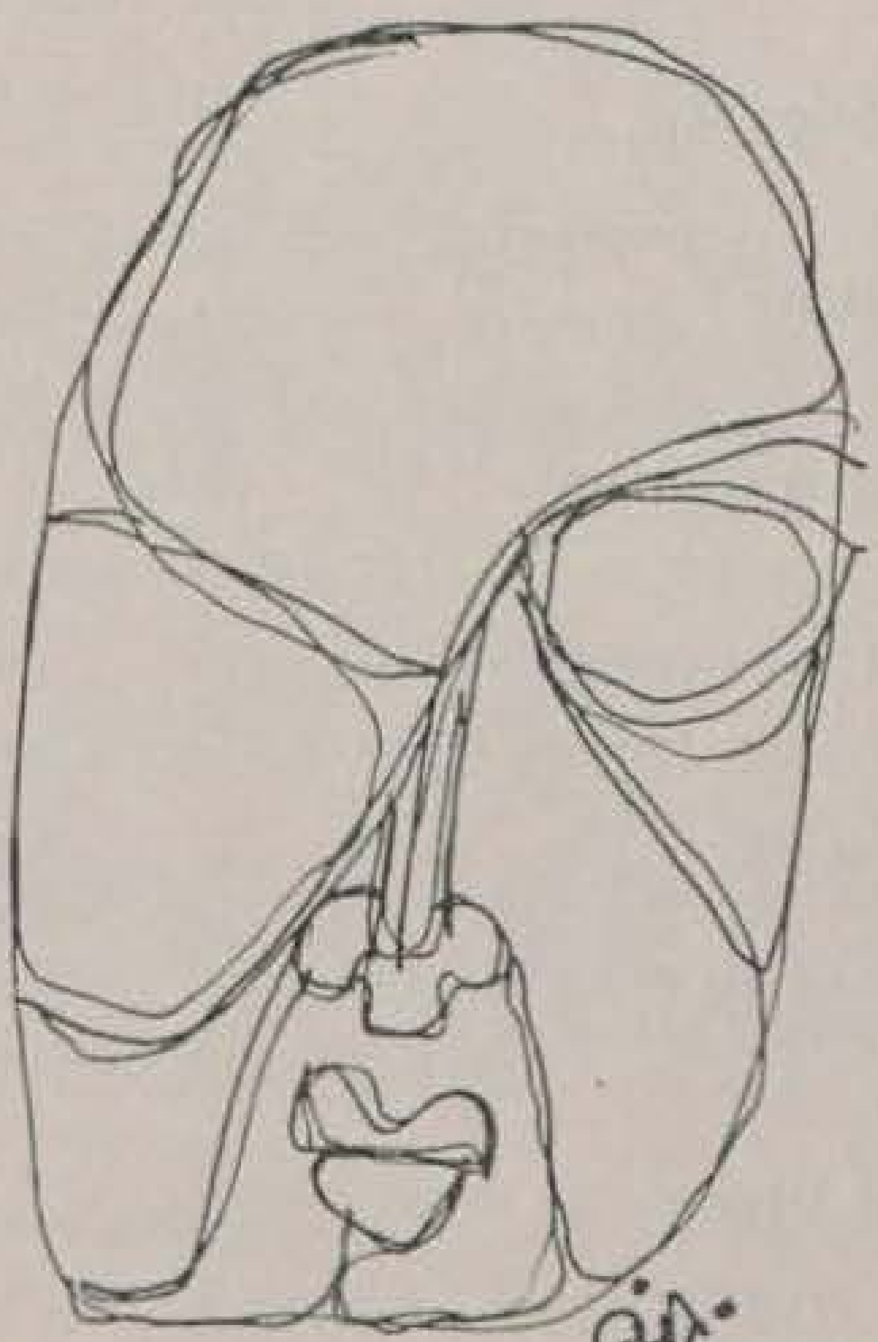
Some times the gaudy shirt
is itself a spectacle.
Some day a violent blow
electrifies him
and makes him eloquent.

Then, Right Then

At first, the photograph of my deceased father
Then
a brief sigh
Then
a glass of water
Then
a cup of hot tea
Then
a cigarette
Then
right then
my feet touch the ground.

And up comes—
another day.

Translated from Bengali by Manish Nandy



ANANDA GHOSH HAZRA

The Birth

I have come and stood by the deserted gallery;
Mephistophilis, hand over the key.
I am bound for deliverance.
The king and the emperor and the jester
all have gone.
Gone are the band of nautches;
the populace, all and sundry, have also gone the same way
into the seminal womb of procreation.
The whole gallery is another dark foetus,
newly conceived, as it were.
Give me the key: I intend giving myself over.

The yellowing words, broken into pieces
are flying from the hacking saw helter skelter.
The primal farmhand, rickety and hardy
is thrashing paddy in the autumnal sun.
I can hear the toiling words, though of late faint,
the words that are busy in weaving sunshine,
wrapt in meditation, attuned to eternity.
Give me the key. I go for the final embrace,
the chequered pattern.

I am there in the central foetus, Mephistophilis,
by the natal room, in the soft light of the lamp
aquiver in agony or ecstasy.
On the thatched roof the bamboo leaf
trembles in the spectral wind,
there's a tremendous tug at my nerves—
Give me the key. On to the land of procreation. . . .

Homo Erectus

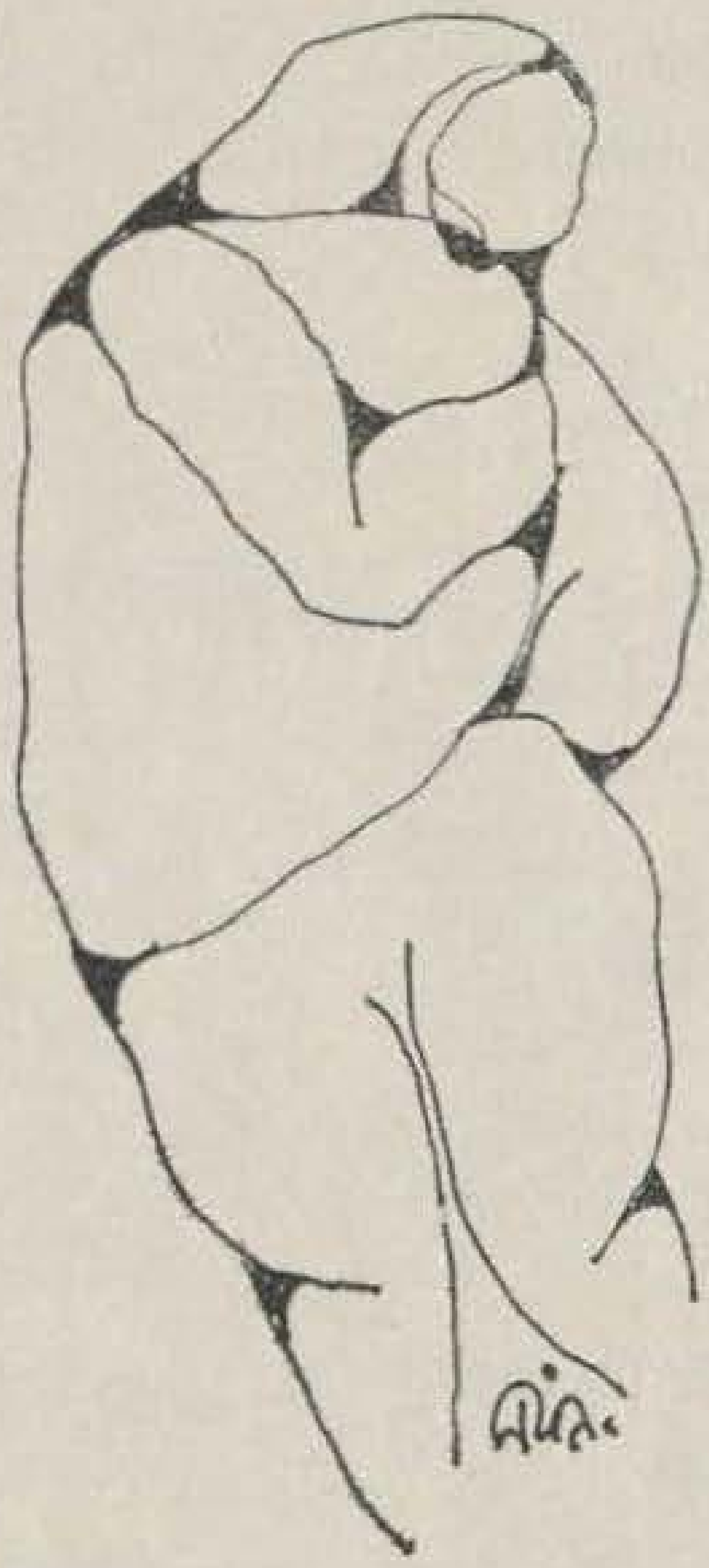
It was in Kenya
The boy of twelve had come
to the lake, Turkana by name.
He came all by himself.
It was more than one and half million years ago.
He wore a face that knew no language.
He had come to the mother earth
thirsty, searching for water.
The expanse of the marsh had snakes, hippos
and was fringed by hyenas.
The boy had little occasion to harbour
any other thought.

May be, the boy of twelve bent down
and touched the water fringe
of the lake, Turkana.
The drove of crocodiles might have seen
his frail frame on the sly.
The gleaming eyes of unknown ferocious beasts
might have flashed in greed and hunger
from the darkling forests.
But all the same, the boy was closely clinging
to the stream of life.

Today, the anthropologist, a distant descendant of his,
torn away from the stream of life, sees him.
Flash floods carry away the ancient lava dusts.
The femur, bleached bones, the skull and the jaw
suddenly break into a soundless laughter.
The surprised flounder with steadfast eyes
is watching the image of his fossil.

Towards the close of the twentieth century
in the Turkana lake of Kenya
cavorts the skull of the primordial boy.

Translated from Bengali by Partha Sarathi Chowdhuri



J.B. MORAES

The White Cow

On the narrow path
strewn with rough stones
the old woman
runs searching
for her white cow
pausing every moment
looking hither and thither.

She brushes past
the thorny babul bushes.
Tiny red drops appear
on her feet
soon turning to red streams.
The small sharp stones
stab her bare feet
like a hundred pins—
she feels nothing.

She is young again:
seeing the goats
bounding from rock to rock
she trips but steadies
with her cane
while walking on the fallen berries
and runs forth.

The sun is setting,
the forest comes alive.
But where is the white cow?

Where is it hiding?
Why does it harass me
at this old age?

She had not felt this way
when the daughter was given away
five years to the day.
Since the white cow came home
the loss of daughter
was filled by the white cow,
her life-ember fast extinguishing
began to burn again.

Old woman and the white cow
are two bodies
but one soul:
so much love flows
between them
of the mother and the daughter.

But today the same cow
unkind and ungrateful
has gone away
deserting her.
Why? Why?

It had changed
since last three days
did not touch grass, nor water.
Lifting her tail
would moo every second,
and this morning
has run away
leaving the shed.

Now the old woman runs
following the cow's steps.

So run her thoughts,
only she understands
her white cow
and her language
word for word.

Many a time I have heard
their conversation wonderstruck:
leaning her chin on the
nozzle of the cow
caressing her long neck
whispering in its ears,
the white cow would nod
and move its ears
in response.

These five years
were of utmost happiness.
When the night was long
when sleep would not come
the old woman would walk
to the shed
calling her white cow.

How then, forgetting all these bonds
has the white cow run away?
What has she deprived it?
The rich oilcake drink
the greenest of grass
and a daily bath
brushed with coir.

The old woman stopped :
beyond, among the bushes
under the tree shade
stood her white cow

beside the neighbour's young bull
like two lovers
oblivious to the world.

The old woman stops dead:
why a new bride
though fond of her mother
leaves her for her husband's home
she understands now.

The setting sun's crimson rays
give a rare beauty to the wood
and the old woman is witness
to this rare meeting
with moist eyes
but with warm heart.

What she forgot of
forty years ago
is brought home to her
by the white cow
which she will not forget
very easily again.

Image

On the door step of the temple
under the hot sun
I see her every day.
Her hands and feet are
withered like limbs of a dead tree.

Her eyes tired of searching
for rays of hope
are sunk deep like caves
in a rock.
Neither they receive light
nor give it.

Her three yard sari
has torn in thirty places.
Her body has absorbed
sixty years of dirt.
Her knotty matted hair
is the abode of worm and lice.
Here and there some black teeth
stand as guards in her open mouth.
The lines on her face
have spread far and deep
like the crow's feet.

Raising her shaking hands
with hope in her eyes
she looks at me
and an electric current
joins together our two hearts.
Time goes back fifteen years,
her face changes, her eyes twinkle!
When she smiles, her teeth dazzle!
In that one magic moment
I see the image of my dead mother!

Dew Drop

On the green Alu leaf
in the shimmering dew drop

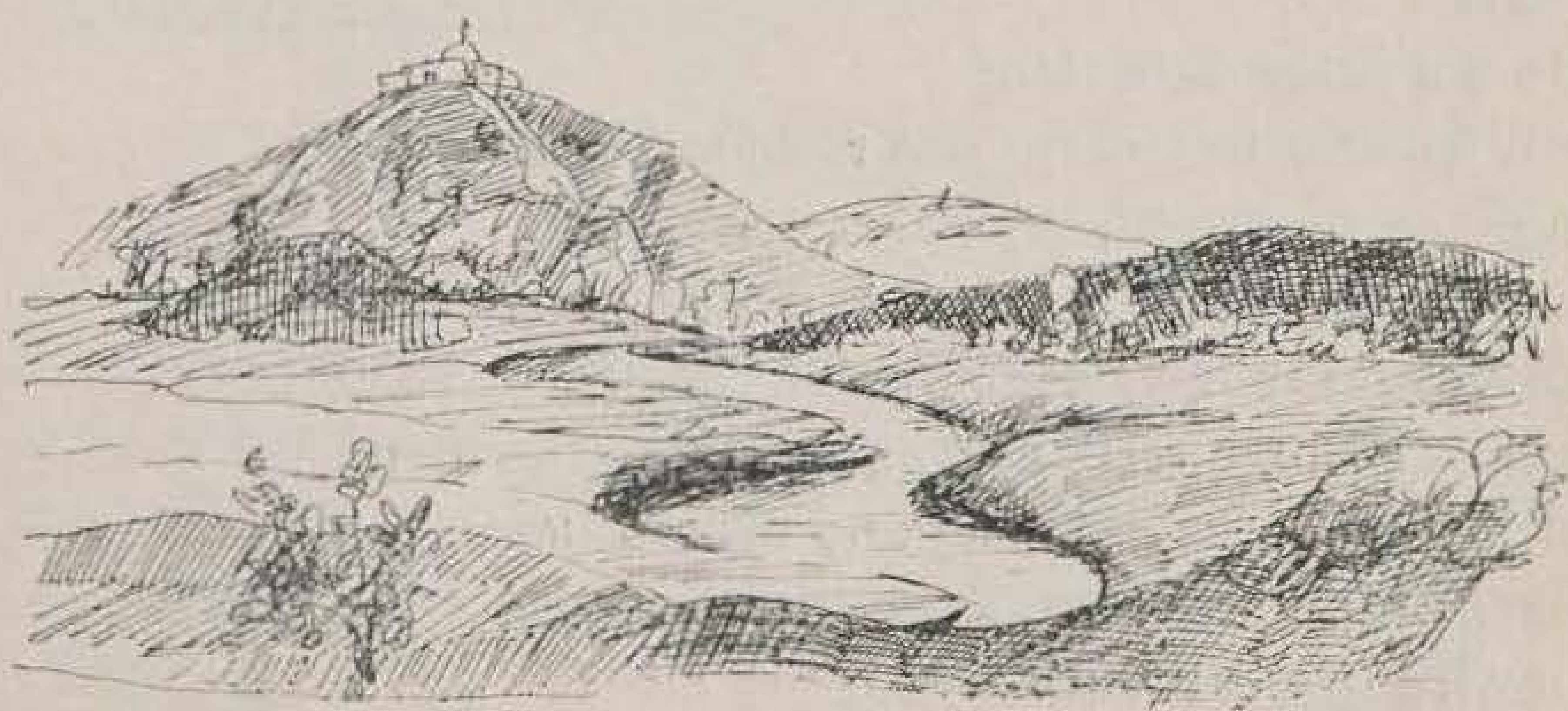
I saw the reflection
of the sky.

I saw in miniature
in that dew drop
brids of many hues
singing and flying in the sky
branches of trees
dancing to and fro
to the murmuring wind.

Beyond the hills
when the morning sun
comes rising blood red
I see the rainbow
dancing in hundred colours
in that dew drop
turing it into
a priceless diamond.

I saw the whole world
in that tiny dew drop
as the boundless love of you
has filled this little heart.

Translated from Konkani by the poet.



K. AYYAPPA PANIKER

Why So Late, Rama?

Ravana

Why so late, Rama?
Years are passing.
I have mounted all the steps of *virodha bhakti.*
Lakshmi who never stays away from you
has been here for so long now!
Do you want me to tell you of your duty?
People see only my acts of hostility;
Don't you also understand the intensity behind them?
Or is it possible
that my hostility is not intense enough?
I thought of attaining *mukti* in three births;
but I can have only one birth in one *yuga.*
When will I, Rama, get back to Vaikuntha?
When I left Vaikuntha,
you also came after me;
why so late, Vishnu,
so late?
I do not know how long
I will be able to sustain this *virodha bhakti.*
On many occasions, my anger cools down.
The wind from the sea that encircles Lanka
fans down my terrible temper.
Again waking up, roaring and shaking the mane,
I strike wind against wind and enact *raudra.*
When I miss my steps, O Dasarathi,
I unwittingly call out to you,
for fear of others knowing the truth

I feign sarcasm.
Rama, I alone cannot
sustain this enmity.
That *Devi* whom I took away
to rekindle our enmity,
I think, knows the truth.
You know, of course, that I think so.
Poor girl!
In our political intrigues, she's only a puppet, a proxy.
(Rama, is it possible that you are not Vishnu?)
When I secured the boons
I provided a few loop-holes for you:
a woman
and a monkey
will cause my doom—then
I was hoping that it will be soon.
I got the boon that only a person
who cuts off my ten heads together will be my killer,
just for having you.
Raghava, only a strip of sea
is between us now.
Now I am furious
about your delay.
You will grant me *mukti*
only after you destroy everything I have.
I understand that *mukti* is death.

Sita

Why so late, Rama?
Gazing constantly at the blooming, falling, decaying flowers
the blue of my eyes has melted.
In my eyes, with dropped lashes
the pupils crave for only one idol
only one idol.
Rama, how will you retrieve me

after making Tara and Mandodari widows?
Raghava, will the sea give in
sacrificing its own principles
for you who have discarded your country
for the sake of truth.
You being a prince
and I, the daughter of the earth
none consulted the horoscopes.
Your troubles started from the day
you broke the bow of Siva.
When you defeated Parasurama,
the hatchet of that Rama conquered you, too.
You killed Tataka
brought Ahalya back to life,
the epic says you have done your duty.
Am I also caught
in my own maya which is your maya, O Sitapati?
O darling,
was it after your incarnation that Narada said,
bhakti is the ultimate embodiment of love?
O Rajivalochana, did you think
that I myself would kill Ravana
and come back to you?
Even now and always,
behind the Kathakali lamp,
when Ravana performs *tiranottam*,
Rama, I think
of your matted hair, bow and arrows
and your manliness of the bark.
Is fate testing
whether you can stay separated
from me for ten months?
You are now a human incarnation only
subject to the rules of *Tretayuga*,
and giving me the secret pleasures of *viraha bhakti*.
You may bestow *virodha bhakti*

or heroic death on Ravana;
But because of you, me and him
several hundreds of innocent people
have to die in pain, O Raghunandana?
I am beginning to understand
that the *mukti* of one is
the death of several.

Hanuman

I'm your servant, O Rama,
I am your servant.
Do you know what I meant
When I chose *dasya bhakti*
when I let myself be chosen for it?
Lord, I do not complain
That it is late.
If one becomes a grammarian
who comes to know
that there is a time for everything,
one will have to be a past participle destined to wait.
For the erudite,
patience is an unavoidable moral obligation.
No complaint, nor grievance, nor disgrace.
O son of Ikshvaku,
in order to find you out
I became a servant of Sugriva,
When the *yugas* passed,
I was moving closer to you.
It seems time is not a problem
for those who have eternal lives.
Dasya bhakti has no time-limits
Mukti is not a full-stop for them,
only a straight, curved line
adept in slow gait.
How long it took me

to convince Sugriva
that you will come, you'll come.
I had to refer to words and lines from *puranas*.
(We monkeys don't usually do this.)
Holy Lord, I don't believe in swiftness for its own sake
When incarnations ensue one after another
in the next incarnation of Rama also
sitting behind these thickets in the forest
waiting for two princes emitting brilliance of the sun
I will heave the sigh of confidence.

I realise that even the desire
to attain *moksha* from *dharma*
artha, kama and *moksha*
is a hindrance to *moksha*.
I have had to see great scholars
die, arguing whether you are man or god.
Ignorant of both—
to them, their truth;
I understand that *mukti*
is the death of ignorance.

"Enthe Vaikunnu Rama?" *Bhashaposhini* (1987-88)

Virodha bhakti, viraha bhakti, dasya bhakti are three facets of devotion, the first signifying devotion in the guise of hostility, the second denoting love in separation and the third standing for a total surrender in service; *mukti* is emancipation from the cycle of birth and rebirth; *raudra*, according to classical Indian dramaturgy, is the sentiment of anger; Dasarathi, Raghava, Rajivalochana, Sitapati, Raghunandana are different ways of addressing Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu, whose abode is Vaikuntha; *Tiranottam* is a convention in Kathakali by which the main character in the play is introduced for the first time.

Translated from Malayalam by Sudha Gopalakrishnan

N.V. KRISHNA WARRIOR

Krishna is Slain!

After wielding sword and shield
Kamsa did jump to the grand arena.
Tall, plump, white and fat
his body, the embodiment of health,
was covered from top to toe
by a heavy armour wrought of steel.
The edge of the sword
that he held in his outstretched hand
at touch severed heads
atoms latent with high charged energy released.
The glowing and the hottest
outflow of blood therefrom burst down earth
like hot and forceful gush
of molten lava out from a smouldering volcano.
The shield that he held
and pushed to fore by his left hand
was charged with unbridled power
generated from a thousand Niagara falls.
Wherever he stamped firmly
with his jack-booted feet very large craters
opened mouths that were caused
by thunderous explosions of tons of bombs:
lightning flashed in eyes blue
on his face of snow-white hue,
flood of violent lethal rays
to burn down anything coming to its sight.
Puffs of poisoned smoke, as if
from an aimed cannon, breathed out of his nose.
Bottle, that filled with arrack

distilled from fermented blood sucked from earth,
was seen dangling sportively
from the band strewn with cartridges like garland.
The crown studded with sapphires,
the symbol of sovereignty over four continents,
people took for a large
steel helmet placed over his coppery head.
Aeroplanes and warships in thousands
and several fleets of armoured cars that rattled
while rolled on caterpillar wheels—
all these if would start
moving together, the combined din terrifying,
Kamsa did create such worlds
of sound in thousands by his boisterous shouts.
Slapping his arms and thighs
and thrusting his chest,
he stood in the arena blind with arrogance.

With faltering and hesitant steps
there comes baby Krishna on bare-foot.
His ribs were seen raised
from the gaunt and swarthy body.
The boy has not
seen milk and curd for years together.
But shepherd's staff and reed
are seen still held by his slim hands.
The boy's nakedness was increased
by the badly torn yellow loin cloth he wore.
A floral garland faded and shrivelled
was hanging over his breast like a deadly curse.
Peacock feathers tied to his tuft
had fallen down by the blow of hot wind.
Five husky hair-locks dangled
on his high forehead and broad shoulders—
on the very forehead that
was kissed and shoulders embraced by milkmaids.

The boy stood shrunk, shivering,
sweating and dazed at the sight of his adversary,
like a bird in forest
hypnotised to see the pair of eyes of a serpent.

Kamsa's rising forearm suddenly
knocks down the boy to roll on the ground.
A boot like a mechanised hammer
is downing towards the tender head.
Krishna's head is bursting
like a pressed egg is breaking.
A little blood, a little brain,
they mingle to soak the soil.

Kamsa's commanders like Chanoora
and Mustika shout hilariously in rapturous glee.
Gods shower parijata flowers
over the head of the victorious hero.
Heavenly girls sing and rises
the welcome symphony of ethereal instruments.
The melody of rattle of anklets
of dancing *apsaras* echoes throughout the world.
The holy sages, seekers of truth,
are extrolling him much aloud!

The story that Krishna slayed
Kamsa merely a poet's vision in a day dream.
But slaying of Krishna
by Kamsa, a hard truth we witness everyday.

"Krishna Vadham"

Translated from Malayalam by T.K. Jayanthan

RAJENDRA BHANDARI

The Face

This shape seen in the pot
this is not the shape of the water.
This man, who has arrived at rocket,
had begun from the bullock-cart;
at palaces, from jungles and
at the firmament, from caves;
gathering into a single whole from scattered pieces at times,
at times scattering himself in pieces from a complete whole,
this man
    whom even a thousand rivers of blood failed to sweep away
this man,
    still unburnt even by the explosion of a thousand bombs.

In every age he tore asunder every definition and
made off from the unfathomable, well guarded dam
the feeling of certainty is, but a collapsed dam.
This stream of men has been flowing, breaking open every dam.
Not contained by any thing
he flows and flows and keeps flowing on.
An ever flowing and surging vast rush of water.
Every drop of the rushing water is the face of *rakta-vija*
the face that never remains the same,
the face that never remains silent,
that which for ever and ever moves about,
that which for ever and ever remains in haste,
this face, that you see now, is not the face of man.

O you, look at the trees; at the animals and birds look;
Look at the hills standing upright; see their faces.

There may exist a shade of permanency,
there may be a truth in action.
But do not search him in solitary places,
He lives in crowds.
Even then, don't seek him in multitudes
he remains sobbing alone in the crowd.

He melts away, flows away, gathers into solid state, weeps,
stands upright and bores the sky with his hand,
sits down and his feet touch the nether world.
He rather likes torment by thoughts,
he rather chokes, rather dies of suffocation,
but he cannot be tied down to a definition.
Out of the smoke of Hiroshima he raises himself as a Sphinx
from the Siberian nights, both percipitous and smooth,
bursts into never-ending song of emancipation.
It plays the melody, the ceaseless symphony,
the endless symphony, the endless rising and lowering of tune.

Let him go
he goes ahead weeping, goes ahead smiling,
leave him alone,
he goes ahead jumping, goes ahead dancing.
He goes ahead that way without a pause
to the direction where his sky abides;
where there is his pause, activities and his face.
This, a handful of rays gathered
in the bulb made of bones and flesh
This ancient veena played upon its will a feeble breath,
the rays shall spread until the end of the endless endlessness.
The veena shall resound as long as the eternity remains.
This face that is in great haste to reach a point,
to become somebody
don't take a snap when it has traversed only half the way.
This is not the face of man,
not the face of man.

River/a few alphabets

Flew away like winter dusts
kicked up by cattle hooves,
the meaning from words. Asleep are
the carcasses of alphabets on the pages of book and
in the brains of men, like the day
in the cemetery of diary.

Collision with a man in a crowd, a car accident,
vanishing of mist, shedding of leaves in the swing
of breeze—what explanations should be sought in them?
On the courtyard floor in front of the house leaves of tree,
on the plinth of mind the young shoots of dreams
keep falling time and again—
What meaning should be sought in them?

After burying desires I am a camphor standing by
bearing a few letters in my breast in memory of bygone wishes
I, a deep, irresistible and wilful silence,
a silence that cracks like a wall,
and explodes like a forest conflagration.

While still looking on,
                    the swallows of happiness fly past overhead
and vanish in the faraway evening. An emergency procession
of thoughts takes rest for a while with its tired calves of legs.
When in the night the whole bazaar falls asleep
the rippling sound of the stream
                                        that flows a little downhill is heard.
Now the bazaar within me is fast asleep, and I hear
the sighing of the river,
the river that has been flowing
for ages and ages.

Translated from Nepali by Dan Khaling

FAIZ AHMED FAIZ

Ask me not for that old fervour

Ask me not for that old fervour, my love.
I'd then imagined
that your love could spark off my being
counterpoise the giant agony of the world
that your beauty would bring every spring to eternal bloom.
And what else was there to cherish in life but your eyes.
Once you were mine, wouldn't fate itself bend to me
since you were my be-all, end-all?

I'd only willed it all
but this was not to be
for there are other sorrows than heartaches
other raptures than mere love-play.

If there are those dark, savage, ageless spells
bodies robed in silk, satin and velvet
then aren't there also bodies
traded down streets and alleyways
bodies smeared in dust, bathed in blood
bodies with puss oozing from their chronic sores
bodies festering, ailing, smouldering in ovens?

If these images also seize my eye,
even though your beauty still enthralls,
it's because there are other sorrows than heartaches
other raptures than mere love-play.

So ask me not for that old fervour, my love.

"Mujh se pehli si muhabat mere mehboob na mang"
from *Nakshe-e-Faryadi*

Dogs

Tramping about the streets, these pariah dogs,
born to the prerogative of beggary—
these dogs whose only treasure is everybody's leg-kick
whose only meed is the world's execrations.

Not a moment's respite, day or night—
garbage cans their homes, drains their hideouts.

If roused, they may be set off one against the other—
just dangle before them a morsel of bread.
The targets of anybody's shove,
they'd just fade away on empty stomachs.

But if these destitutes ever waxed insurgent
the human tyranny would lose its sting.
If only they willed, they'd reign supreme
for they could chew up the bones of their masters.

All this—
if only someone'd just awaken them to their ignominy,
shake up their sagging tails
to action!

"Kutte" from *Nakshe-e-Faryadi*

Two Quatrains

I

Last night, a fugitive memory of you came
gliding into my heart
as though a wilderness is suddenly touched by a springtide
as though some zephyr comes soughing through a desert
as though a patient, for no reason, feels the caress of health.

II

Today my heart is tossed on the seas of sorrow.
Every breath is pledged to cosmic sadness.
How wantonly desolate is all human concourse!
O, the pang of love, where are you today?

From *Nakshe-e-Faryadi*

Ghazal

Bereft of the treasures of both worlds
                    for your love's sake
there goes someone, martyred to a night of agony.

Deserted is the tavern, despondent are the cups and wine—
how your separation has estranged me to every spring.

To lend me just a four-day span to sin—
O my Creator, is this how I should savour your magnanimity?

This life's grind has weaned me away from you,
for aren't its entanglements more alluring than love?

Only casually did she flash just a smilet today—
and then, O Faiz, how my sagging heart bounced into ecstasy!

"Ghazal" from *Nakshe-e-Faryadi*

To My Love

Let there be some clouds, some wine
and then if doomsday follows, who cares?

Let the silver moon descend from her balcony
and in the cup-bearer's palm glimmer the moonshine.

Let tapers glow in every blood-vein
as she emerges, her face unveiled.

On every page of my life-book rests your eye;
there's a sequence of cantos, of your grace and commitment.

As I was bringing to book today all my life's sorrows
O, how those myriad memories of you came
flooding into my heart.

Never could I challenge my heartache's supremacy
even though insurgency has been my heart's wont.

Up in flames would go that stranger's abode,
balcony and threshold
each time my destitute self would show up there.

Such was the resonance of my silence
that its echoes rebounded from all directions.

Utterly triumphant was my life's journey, O Faiz
success greeted me wherever I went sure-footed.

Untitled—from *Duste-saba*

Translated from Urdu by Shiv K. Kumar

Meet the Author



Gangadhar Gadgil spoke at *Meet the Author* programme, organised by the Sahitya Akademi and the India International Centre, on 11 December 1987. Despite a chilly, rainy, wintry evening, when few dare stir out of their homes, literary connoisseurs of Delhi turned out in good number to listen to Gadgil. We give Gadgil's speech with his pithy answers to questions from the audience followed by one of his short stories.— *Ed.*

Thriving on Controversy

GANGADHAR GADGIL

FRIENDS, it is a great honour to be invited here under the auspices of the Sahitya Akademi and the India International Centre to address such a distinguished audience. At the same time, it is a very embarrassing proposition. To talk about oneself, I think, is not something one relishes and I feel that a man tells most about himself when he is talking about something else. He is apt to conceal or distort when he is talking about himself but when he is talking about other things he tells, without knowing it, a lot about himself. But the Sahitya Akademi, it seems to me, wants writers to talk about themselves. The reason must be that it is useful to know what writers think of themselves and their work, irrespective of whether it is sensible or true.

I think I would first give a picture of my personal life but I will not tell you all the events in my life : they are all given in the brochure. Nothing very dramatic has ever happened in my life. I have not deserted my wife, my wife has not deserted me and everything is going fine; I have always had a job, I have never starved; poverty has not stared me in the face and I have never been the victim of famine; I have never participated in any *morchas* and I have not been attacked by terrorists. So nothing really dramatic has happened in my life. It has been an ordinary

good middle class life, of a man living in Bombay. I learnt early that if you want to do well in life you should perform well at the University. So I did it and everything has been fine afterwards.

I remember a photograph which my father had very fondly taken when I was a child. That photograph is lost somewhere now, but I remember the photograph where I, as a child, was squatting firmly on the ground, leaning a little forward, aggressively somewhat, with a big frown on my face saying that I don't like this world and I want to have no part of it and yet with a look of certain curiosity about the world around. I think that tells a lot about myself, not everything but quite a great deal.

I will tell you about my first memory as a child. I was very small, I remember I was taken by my mother in her arms somewhere to some women's festival and then she joined the other ladies to have some fun playing games and singing songs. She just put me down and went away. I felt utterly lost and abandoned. That was the first experience of unhappiness I had in my life. I don't know why I remember this incident, but I feel that it has been very much a part of my life in many different ways. A sense of loneliness of a person, of a human being, is, I think, an experience that has haunted me, all along. And that has been very much a part of my literature.

"Vyasa is my hero as a writer, I wish I could do something like what he had done. One feels so small before him. Dostoevsky is a writer I like, and Tolstoy too."

I became a writer because in the first place I used to like to read. My mother tells me that I was rather a wild boy and one way to make me stop being a nuisance was to bring a book and give it to me. I would then settle down and just keep on reading stories. So I loved literature as a boy and it all came from my mother, who was not educated, really. She

studied up to third standard in a secondary school and she was married off. She was a great lover of literature and she, I think, had read as much as some of the college lecturers in Bombay and she had a literary taste. A very popular writer I remember wrote always about the domestic scenes and the deities being worshipped at home and about the little lamp lighted in front of the deities. He wrote the kind of nice literature that women like to read and which sells very well. My mother was annoyed with that writer, she said, "What kind of writer is he? Could he not write anything else except about the deity and the little lamp in front of the deity? Does he not get tired of writing such stuff?" That was the first literary criticism I heard. I mention my mother at length because I think she has contributed a great deal through heredity and through her influence to my being a writer.

"Writing should come from the stomach, not from the head."

I started writing very early, when I was in the third or fourth standard in the secondary school; my first little article was published in my school magazine and after that I never stopped and I have not stopped even now. I should have, I think, but I have not. I wrote for my school magazine, my college magazine and then I thought this was too small a field and I must go for something better and my first story was published when I was in the junior B.A. class, and I had just finished seventeen. Since then I have been published all along. So I always feel a little surprised when authors complain that nobody publishes what they write, that they are neglected, nobody pays any attention to what they do and it is very diffieult to find publishers and editors. My experience was different. May be I had difficulties in getting my books published, but I could get over them. I don't like to complain and work up righteous indignation, which many authors love to do. I was just lucky.

What I wrote was at first imitative, naturally. I used to write stories like Phadke, who was a very distinguished writer, and Khandekar who had an all India reputation. I tried very hard to write like them. But somehow I discovered that while I could imitate them fairly well, that was not what I wanted to say at all—I mean what I was experiencing as a young boy: the moods of excessive elation, the moods of great depression, which are a part of adolescence, the awakening of sex, the terrifying loneliness and uncontrollable yearning, the tremendous impact of so much knowledge and so many things happening on a young mind! The problems of life seem so big and overwhelming at that age. This was my world of experience. It was chaotic, stormy, intense. And I wanted to write about it. I thought that these writers I was imitating were always writing about love and about sacrifice for the country and all that. The stories had well knit plots, well defined characters, neat and tidy ends and well written in a beautiful style. It was all very beautiful and noble and tidy. I felt that this was not my world of experience, so let me write something different, but I didn't know how to go about it, because it was just not done. I mean stories had to follow a particular kind of conventional pattern.

When I went to college there was in the library a big English fiction section, and I pounced on it. I read it from end to end. I went through the whole stack of books that were there and I found that these writers were doing something which I would like to do. That their experiences and their writings were in some way similar to what I wanted to write, and so I started to write stories of the kind that I felt like writing.

Nothing very big, dramatic, scenic, happens in my stories. They are stories about ordinary life. The first story I wrote about my experiences was the story of a little girl, whose teacher leaves the school. You know, it is a big event for little children that the school teacher to whom they have been attached, whom they worship, should decide to leave school and

go away, possibly because she was married or something like that. There is emotional turmoil, a whole lot things happen in the little class of children when the teacher resigns, and the children cry and the teacher cries and there is a sense of desolation. We grown ups think of this as a little funny but it is something very serious for children at that age. I said, well, this is what I would like to write about. And I wrote a story of what happened, the series of things that happened, when the teacher left school. When I wrote it I was extremely happy. I said, my God, this is the kind of thing I want to write. These are the kind of stories that are my stories.

"My best story I have yet to write."

I think my progress as a writer can be best seen through the series of controversies I have been continuously involved in. I remember that, when I was a boy, I used to read controversies of writers and feel quite frightened. Writers when engaged in controversy attack each other with venom. I would say to myself, this is something I would not like to do, I want to avoid it if I can. But you know, although I didn't want it, I got embroiled in controversies.

I remember it was in 1948 that I was recognised as a writer. A very distinguished poet and critic in Marathi, B.S. Mardhekar (who was an Akademi Award winner also), wrote a critical article, greatly appreciating my stories and saying how different they were from what others wrote. Unfortunately in the same year I got embroiled in controversy. It all happened because I delivered a speech at a literary association of a college. Such speeches are very minor literary events. The press doesn't report such speeches. (Here I would like to say something about the Marathi press, it is somewhat different from the press in other languages. Literature is very important in Maharashtra and if anything happens in the field of literature

that is interesting the newspapers publish it.) In my speech I criticised writers, like Phadke and Khandekar, of that era, for the kind of things they wrote. I said that we the young writers were creating a new short story in Marathi At that time Mardhekar was writing new poetry in Marathi and I said something about what we were trying to do and criticised the earlier writers. To my horror, I found that this speech was reported on the front page of the leading Marathi daily of those times, *Nava Shakti*. As journalists generally do, it was a very coloured version, I think, highlighting the points where I seemed to be most critical. The consequences were immediate. They pounced on me, from one end of Maharashtra to the other, from Nagpur down to Belgaum and from Bombay down to Hyderabad because in those days, Hyderabad city was a major centre of Marathi literary activities. I was criticised and I was really flabbergasted. I was not used to it. Now I am quite used to it, it happens to me all the time, but at that time I was flabbergasted and I was just twenty-five, I had no experience of being criticised like that and it was a very savage criticism. At least I thought so at that time, but then you know journalists have very sharp pens and they use them without compunction. And there I was in the midst of a controversy. Now when it comes to a fight and if somebody is fighting you, you naturally fight back and that is what I did and that was my first controversy.

I would not like to tell you about the controversy and all the points in the controversy. But I will tell you what I said in my speech about the new short story we young writers were creating. The distinguishing features of this story can be briefly indicated.

In the first place we do not regard a well-knit plot as an essential part of a story. The story can be a string of incidents or it can be even a string of reflections, or it can be really a statement of various sensations and impressions and responses in a particular situation. For example in one of my stories, "The Faceless Evening", all that happens is that the writer walks home on a very faceless evening, a kind of evening that

brings out the meaninglessness and horror of life. What he saw and felt became a story. The sensations, the impressions, the things he saw, the big posters, the little children, the beggars and the ramshackle Victoria being driven along the road—all these created a kind of pattern, pattern of insignificance and irrelevance. And yet there was a certain central unity. It all built up a mood. Well, that is the kind of story I wrote.

Secondly, the characters we create are complex, complex in the sense that they are not straight-line characters like Hanuman being a very devoted servant of Rama; not straight-line characters, simple characters but more complex characters full of inconsistencies, who often say one thing but do something else, who mean to do something but are not able to do that and give some rationalisation for their behaviour and some very unknown subterrainian impulses and urges drive them in a certain direction. So the subconscious provides an additional dimension to character—various kinds of human neurosis, fantasies, day-dreams and all these things, they constitute part of a character. We created complex three dimensional characters instead of the simple characters that were being created earlier.

> "I do not generally write about people I see: they emerge from inside; may be a smile, a gesture which I have picked up when I am observing, they all fuse together in a character I create. I do not write on the basis of direct observation."

Thirdly, we do not exclude some themes and experiences from our stories. You know there are certain literary conventions, not written but unwritten conventions, that only certain types of themes are worthy of a short story. There were, of course, the stories of love and the stories of historical adventure and there were stories of the Gandhians and the patriotic sacrifice for the country, about concern for the poor; generally it was the ugly thing, the sordid thing, the shocking thing that somehow was kept out of literature. Such experi-

ences were not sort of allowed to get into a story, or suggested, or hinted at. And we said we didn't recognise any such barriers and all of life, the beautiful, the ugly, the obscene, the neurotic, the perverse, the dreaming, the romantic -all these were what we wrote about because that was life. And we wrote not only about the individual characters but sometimes whole groups of characters. And sometimes the story may not be about the same person at all. I wrote a story where there are four women. Neither they, nor what happens to them, are interrelated. Nothing much happens in the story either, and yet there is a pattern about all these women and the cameos of life in which they are seen. The things that I saw in the characters of the women, they all constitute a pattern, and therefore I said that this is a story.

Fourthly about style, about the use of language: sometimes we do violate grammar. Sometimes we write something that could be considered obscure, not clear. And we do leave out certain words and certain expressions and we do not try to build a beautiful style, with nice cadences and all that. The style chosen is appropriate to the story: one story may require a very poetic style and another story may require a very prosaic style. Different stories require different styles and the narrator again takes different stances, he'll be sympathetic or he'll be unsympathetic, he'll be indifferent: he'll be cold, and he can be a lot of things, and by being so he will again throw a light on the story. The style can be evocative, not only descriptive; the imagery would be again something very unique, for example, in one story of mine there is an old woman who drinks out of a glass of water given by her grandson, and when she drinks, a little drop slides down and is perched on her chin, and it trembles there, and that's an image, a legitimate image and it tells a lot which I would not be able to tell otherwise; so these were the kind of images that we used or I used.

The new Marathi short story was born and it was criticised. Of course, very vehemently; in fact, if all they said was true I

shouldn't have survived. But I have. One thing they said was that these stories were obscure; secondly, that they were obscene because I had written a story in which a woman in late thirties falls for a young adolescent boy and tries to have an affair with him and that was a very unusual theme and I was roundly criticised. In fact, I was told by friends that the Government of Maharashtra—then Government of Bombay—wanted to prosecute me for writing an obscene story. I was preparing to go to jail, not for the freedom of the country, but for an obscene story: it seems very absurd now, but there it was. They didn't, but at least on two or three occasions I reached the point where I was likely to be prosecuted for obscenity. Although, if you read my stories, you'll find that hardly a few of them deal overtly with sex. They will not be considered obscene any more but considered as something which is a part of literature. So I was obscure, obscene, my stories had no meaning.

"I don't criticise any young writer until he has written for about ten years."

I was also criticised for writing stories that were *jantuvadi*, as they were called, which looked upon a human being as a worthless insect, which denied the dignity of the individual man and which were pessimistic and which did not show any Marxist leanings or awareness. They were criticised because they did not show proper social awareness. It was said that my stories were expressing really the kind of situation which arises before a revolution takes place. They expressed a kind of demoralisation of the middle class and eventually a revolution would take place and I should be aware of what was in store, I should see things in the true Marxist context. I was a student of economics and I was never impressed by Marxism. Thus the Marxists were at my throat and the traditionalists too, those who believed in Gandhian ideology were at my throat and the old writers were at my throat, and it was quite a number of people at my throat. But at the same time there was the

younger generation of college students and younger people who somehow liked what I was doing. They said this was something new and something they liked and used to write to me in those days; women didn't write so much to a writer in those days, but some of them who read my stories in the fifties, they write to me and tell me that they liked the stories and that as young girls they used to get together and discuss them. It's funny to get letters from elderly women about what they felt in their younger days.

This was the series of controversies that I got involved in: the people who believed in Tagore, and the cult of beauty in literature and those that believed in literature that motivates and the Marxists, and the Gandhians, all of them were critical. Those were the days of trial through which I passed. Now of course the kind of stories I wrote have been accepted and I am recognised as a writer: the work we did is considered pathbreaking.

"Saratchandra is a greater writer than Tagore."

I used to be in Government service. It was a mistake in my life, and I left it quickly afterwards. And once the Secretary of the Education Department invited me and said, "Look here, you are a writer and you want to write what you like. But you know in Government we have got our civil service rules, and they have to be observed." He was a good man and said, "Why don't you write under a pen-name. In that case you can write what you want and I don't have to take notice of it." He tried to solve the problem in a typically bureaucratic manner. I said, "Sorry, I want to write under my name and if you don't like it, tell me right away so that I will look for another job and take it." Soon afterwards I left the Government service and got a job in a private college. I wanted none of these bureaucrats telling me what to write. It was one of the happiest decisions I took in my life.

I wrote serious short stories and at the same time I was writing humorous stories and these were criticised by some of

my admirers. Mardhekar was an admirer of my serious short stories and said these were not the kind of stories I should be writing, I should be devoting myself to something much more serious. Of course I gave a lot of thought to what he said because he was a sensitive critic of literature, but I said no, this is what I feel like writing and I am going to write it. I like serious writing, but I also immensely enjoy Dickens and Wodehouse and Mark Twain and all of them. Life seems to me so absurd there is no point in not laughing at it; we are so inconsistent, so ridiculous, although we take life very seriously; and I felt I must write about it. So I created a character called Bandu, and his wife Snehalata, and they are now a part of the Marathi literature. After some time I was bored and I stopped writing about them. I got threatening letters from my readers: they liked my Bandu stories, they said, and asked why I stopped writing stories about Bandu? I wrote a few more but later branched off into other types of humorous writing. Marathi humour at the time was, as you know, essentially satirical. Humour with serious intent, humour to criticise the social foibles, social orthodoxy, that was Marathi humour: at least one branch of Marathi humour; it was very literary involving a lot of play on words, and, so on, and I didn't like it. Parodies were very common and I found parodies were tiresome; a little bit of such writing is all right. But it is so easy to parody something: I mean once you get the hang of it you just go on and you can parody a story or a poem very easily. No problem. Why should humour be spent on this alone? Humour is a lot of fun, humour is lot of absurdity in life and lot of things to laugh at or just high spirits or just slapstic. What is wrong with slapstic? That is also a part of life you can enjoy! Take Charlie Chaplin: ninety per cent of what you enjoy in Charlie Chaplin is slapstic; ten per cent, which you don't enjoy, is really the serious stuff which people admire though I don't much care for it anyway. But I like that kind of humour and I said why should not I write humour like that? Those were the kind of stories I wrote.

And then again I tried different genres. For example, I travelled abroad and I wrote a book on that, naming it Beyond the Seven Seas. I wrote two articles, on Rome: one was on the eternal Rome and the second was on the ludicrous Rome, the Rome which is full of misadventures and anybody who has been to Rome would tell you what kind of things happen to a person when one is in it; all kinds of things can happen to him: simplest of them is that his purse is stolen rightaway and the thieves are very polite, they return the passport to your Embassy, I'm told; there are very considerate kind of thieves in Italy. All kinds of things happened to me, the Italian driving, the Italian love-making, the Italian garrulousness. It was such a lot of fun and I enjoyed it immensely, as much as I enjoyed the Sistine Chapel and I wrote about all these experiences. And then I have also written about my life as a youngster: this again is a very humorous version of my life as a young boy, my life as a college teacher and the terrible things that can happen to you, if you are the principal of a college. All sorts of things befall you. So these were the kind of things I wrote about.

I wrote in the 1950's a number of humorous one-act plays. And I wrote a full-length farce. A farce is also literature and I wanted to write a farce, so I wrote a farcical play. That was the beginning of farcical plays in post-Independence Marathi. I wrote some books for children too.

"I am always very chary about making any statement about literature: Your response to literature may be different and it is as legitimate as mine."

In the midst of all this I also became a critic. Not because I wanted to be, but because of controversies. I had to reply and in the course of doing so I wrote literary criticism. It was in the first place an attack on Sanskrit poetics, not Sanskrit poetics in its totality, but as it was understood in Maharashtra in

those days. Later on, very good books on Sanskrit poetics appeared and its various implications were brought out better. But in those days the presentation of Sanskrit poetics was very sketchy in Marathi; and I said what good does it do? My contention was that the concept of Rasa does not fully encompass literary experience. The classification of Rasas serves no useful purpose. The Rasa theory does not bring out the aesthetic significance of literary form and in any case one hardly uses it in actual appreciation of literary works. My simple test was that any literary theorising is to be judged ultimately by how far it enables you to appreciate a poem, or a short story, or a play. If it helps, it is good. If it doesn't, it is irrelevant. That is a simple test. I read about the *rasa* theory and about *dhwani* and whole lot of things but no critic that I know of, at least modern critics that I know of, has written any piece of literary appreciation, literary criticism based on those ideas. When thev criticise, they seem to be writing something else.

"I have my theory and I would try to put it this way but there can be other theories: there is really no way of proving that any one is the best and acceptable theory: likes and dislikes and values can differ."

I was at war with Marxists. My contention was that Marxism was very inadequate as an explanation of social life and behaviour and in any case literature was not which Marxists thought it was. That war still goes on because Marxists are a very stubborn people, you know. They want to keep on writing and I keep on writing too. I also criticised the theories of beauty and the silly talk about *Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram* being one and the same thing. I was at war with people's ideas about style. And all these ultimately came out in a book, *Khadak ani Pani*, that is Rocks and Water. The book is studied at all levels, that is, college level, at post-graduate level and the graduate level. So it's very

much a part of Marathi literary criticism. But at that time I was raising not one but several hornet's nests.

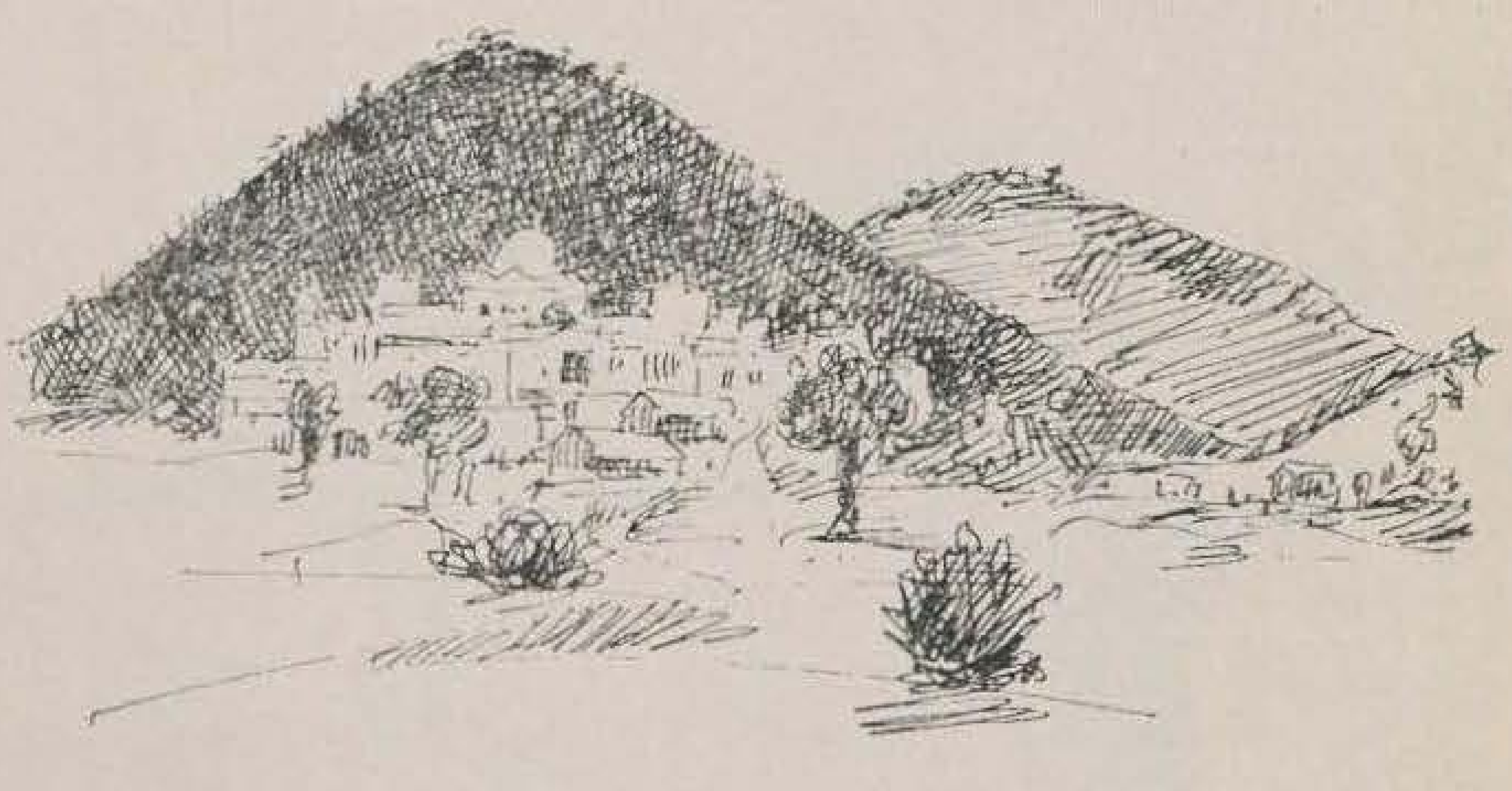
My main critical writing has been in the area of literary appreciation. Polemics is one part of criticism and through polemics a very broad theory of literature can emerge. I don't care very much to build a logically worked out theory of literature. My purpose is to appreciate literature but within a broad framework of ideas which help me to appreciate literature better. Ultimately what is worthwhile is this *Aswadak Sameeksha* as I call it: applied criticism, as it is called. If I can tell somebody that I read this book and I enjoyed it and this is why I enjoyed it and this is the kind of impact it had on me and if I can put it in an orderly manner, going a little deeper into it, I think it is literary criticism. That is the true literary criticism which can be tested by a reader by reading the book and finding out how he is reacting to it. Anything else which theorises, I call a house of cards; and very often they are derived from, you know, philosophy. You first take an idealist position and then you derive a theory of literature from it. But these are philosophical theories. They are not all bad, nor are they all wrong. I do appreciate their value and usefulness and contribution. But they are inadequate. They start from the wrong point. They don't serve my purpose. What I want literary criticism to do is, to appreciate literature better. If that helps me, fine; if it doesn't, well I am not interested. This is the kind of literary criticism I got involved in.

Then I made a diversion. I wrote a series of stories or rather humorous satirical essays called *Arthik Navalakatha*. Because, I think, our whole economic policy and what is happening to our country, are a long and absurd tale, full of laughter, bitter laughter perhaps. There is a lot of humbug in the economic sermons we hear on the policies we formulate and the jargon they are couched in.

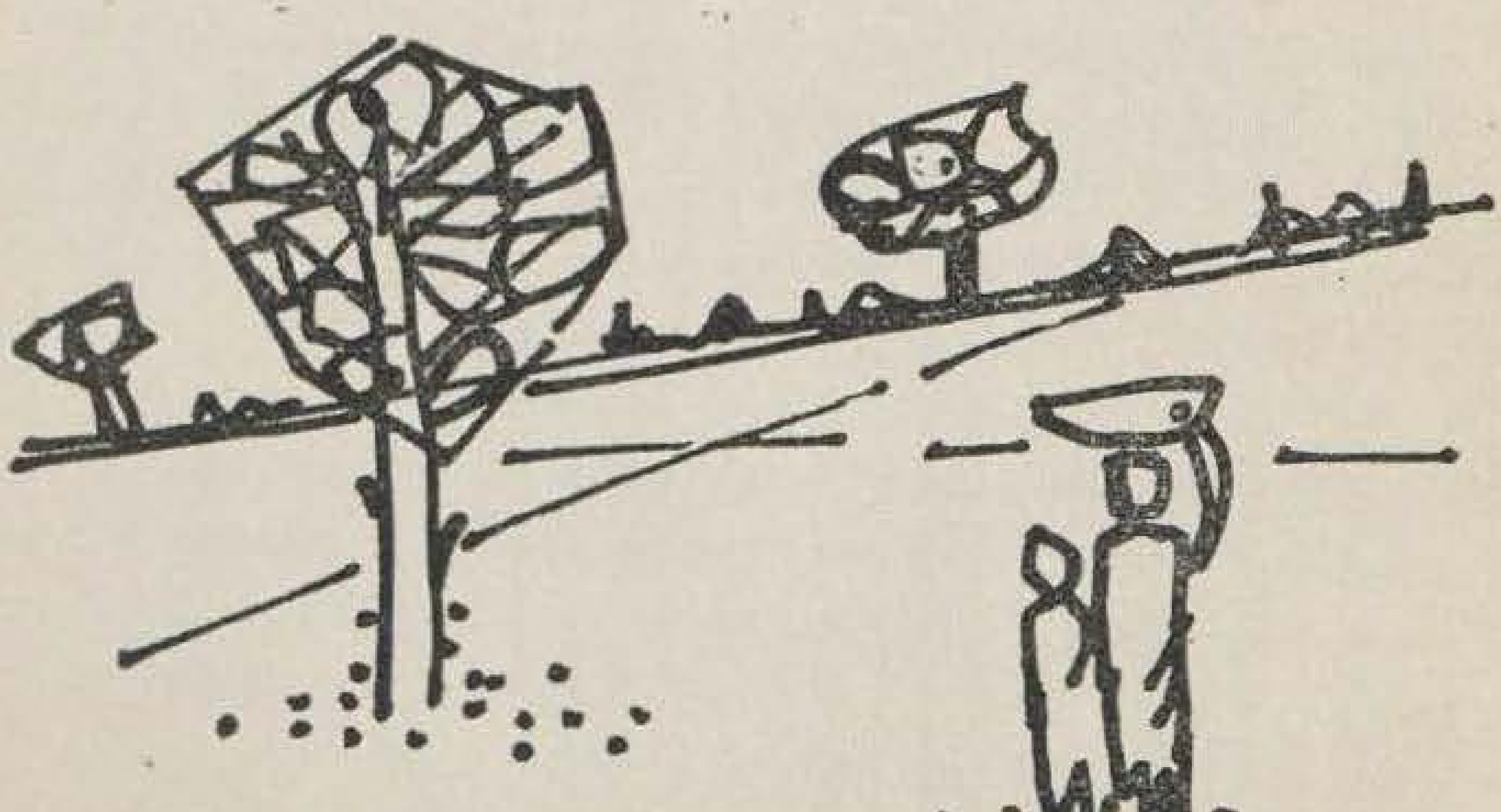
I think I have been rather long, and I have not told the full

story, because there are so many aspects of it. Recently, for example I got bored with the stories I was writing. So, I have written some tales about old times that happen in an indeterminate period in the past in which a Brahmin bows at a guru's feet and goes out to find his way around the world and all sorts of things happen to him. Misadventures befall him. A series of tales I wrote and this is what I feel like writing now. When I have written enough of this kind of stuff I would like to write something else. There is so much to write, so much seething to express itself.

So this then is the long and rambling story of myself as a writer. I'm sure it has been a very uninteresting story. When authors write, they tell about themselves and they tell it much better than by speeches like this. But the Sahitya Akademi wanted me to do this. If you haven't liked it, it is their fault; if you have liked it, the credit, or at least a part of it, goes to me.



Short Stories



This Way and That

GANGADHAR GADGIL

SADA Kaka died at night while asleep. Well! Death comes to some in one way and to some in another. Vishnu, Sada Kaka's friend died of cancer—cancer of the intestines. When he was ill, Sada Kaka had visited him and enquired after his health. But Vishnu ignored the question. He talked instead about the years they had spent together at school. He was so weak that his speech was hardly audible. Sada Kaka couldn't understand a word. Yet he nodded to keep Vishnu happy. In the midst of his reminiscences, Vishnu suddenly burst into laughter. He must have narrated a hilarious episode. Vishnu's stomach convulsed with laughter. That caused such acute pain, that Vishnu could hardly breathe. He perspired profusely. Vishnu's wife rushed into the room and stared at Sada Kaka with angry, flashing eyes. Sada Kaka wasn't at fault at all. But he couldn't explain. Poor Vishnu almost went into a coma and died soon after. Cancer patients should not tell funny stories.

Vaman, another friend suffered from acute diabetes. Yet he wouldn't observe dietary restrictions and refused to take insulin injections. He had a slight wound on his feet. It would have healed, if he had gone to a physician. But he didn't. The result was gangrene. The physician advised amputation of the leg. When Vaman heard that he bawled like a baby. He cried, "No, No! I won't. I am scared."

Vaman sent away the physician and began to smear his head every morning with holy ashes from the temple. He told every body, "I am feeling better. The holy ashes are curing me."

Yet, one day he said, "I am going to die," and wept inconsolably.

Happily he went into coma and died without knowing it. He wasn't therefore scared at all when death took him away.

Rebeiro died in a different way altogether. He used to work in Sada Kaka's office. A very decent guy, always helpful to everybody. He, however, suddenly became very peevish and bitter, when he was due to retire. He annoyed and hurt everybody. This phase lasted for quite some time and then suddenly he became cheerful. He smiled and was nice to everybody. He smiled even to himself. He smiled and smiled and committed a big fraud. He did it so cleverly, that he wasn't found out. He continued to smile and tell everybody how he proposed to fully enjoy life after retirement. But he didn't. Instead he became insane. In that condition he jumped from the fourth floor of a building and died. It was his children who enjoyed themselves with all that money.

This is the way different chaps die, each differently. Sada Kaka, as has been told, died at night while asleep. No visitors, no anxious vigils at the bed side, no parting words of advice to children, no arrangements about inheritance of property. None of this ritual, no final act in the drama. He just died. That was perhaps the way he would have liked it to happen. A neat and tidy person Sada Kaka hated lying ill in bed unshaved and unkempt and helplessly dependent on others. He particularly abhorred the prospect of using a bed pan. Happily he was spared all these indignities.

It wasn't all as neat and tidy though as he would have liked it to be. His head had slipped from the pillow and hung awkwardly over the side of the bed, and his mouth was half open and eyes half closed, when he died. That made him look silly, which he would not have liked at all. His wife was an attractive woman. But her eyes used to remain half open when she slept.

So did at times her mouth. Sada Kaka detested this and used to face the other way when he slept in the same bed. Sleeping in that posture all through the night, he used to feel quite cramped. But he had to suffer it. Only after his wife died, could he sleep comfortably in bed.

Please don't misunderstand. It wasn't as if Sada Kaka did not love his wife. He loved her very dearly. But, there are always some things one can't put up with. Yet as destiny had ordained, Sada Kaka died with his eyes half closed and mouth half open. Sada Kaka should have been spared this indignity. But that was not to be.

In any case, that wasn't half as bad as what happened to Ananta, another friend of his. Ananta lived in an old chawl in Girgaum. He hated having to wait his turn at the row of common toilets. So he used to get up pretty early at five in the morning and use the toilet. That is what he did the day he died. As luck would have it, the entire block of toilets at the rear of the multi-storeyed chawl collapsed, when Ananta was in there. Rain that poured throughout the night must have caused the collapse. Ananta's battered and disfigured body had to be extricated from the filthy and smelly mess of rubble. Ram, oh, Ram! It was a terrible way to die. Sada Kaka luckily was spared such monstrous fate.

Sada Kaka had all along wished to die without being a burden to others in his last days. Children do look after their parents in their last illnesses, others too do help. Nonetheless, it involves endless and unpleasant chores and sleepless nights. So everybody wants it all to be over soon. Not that children don't love their parents. They also do understand that old folks can't help being ill. But looking after old and ailing parents is a lot of bother, and bother is after all bothersome. No one can do anything about it. Even Sada Kaka was quite sick and bonetired when taking care of his old father, incapacitated by a paralytic stroke. He had secretly and guiltily hoped that the end would mercifully come soon. Sada Kaka didn't want his son to feel the same way about him. Happily his wishes had

been granted.

After such a neat and tidy death Sada Kaka should have been properly mourned and cremated. The entire family and his many friends should have gathered and remembered him fondly and tearfully. But events took quite a wrong turn for no fault of his. It was all due to his daughter-in-law. She was a sickly woman ailing with one thing or another all the time. She never could cope with all the rush in the morning hours. Apart from being sickly, she was rather disorganized, clumsy and slow. Overwhelmed as she was with the numerous morning chores, she didn't notice that Sada Kaka hadn't come down for his morning tea. Later she rushed upstairs to fetch something for her husband. Finding Sada Kaka in bed, she walked up to him and asked him where she could find what she wanted. As he didn't reply, she went closer and asked again. Suddenly, she discovered that he was dead with his head askew and mouth half open. That gave her a terrible fright. She screamed and fell down heavily in a fit.

Hearing the scream, her husband rushed upstairs. What followed was utter confusion. He rushed out madly and got hold of the family physician. They both came rushing, the physician examined the daughter-in-law and administered an injection. He then pursed his lips, nodded gravely and advised that a specialist be called. So Sada Kaka's son rushed out again to fetch a specialist. In the meanwhile, the daughter-in-law's sister and brother, who were summoned, rushed in full of concern and queries. Then followed the daughter-in-law's mother and, seeing the condition of her daugher, went into hysterics. She screamed and blamed everybody including Sada Kaka for what had happened to her daughter. In the midst of this hullabaloo none had any time or inclination to attend to Sada Kaka. The family physician had declared him dead and written out a death certificate. Thereafter, as nothing could be done, he was ignored for the time being. Only a crow sat on the window and cawed incessantly to announce a death.

Luckily for Sada Kaka his daughter who was then in town

came to know what had happened, and rushed to his bedside. She sat there and kept vigil. Hadn't she arrived, the crow might have boldly flown in and thrust its greedy beak into Sada Kaka's eyes. That would have been terrible. Don't you say that such things never happen. Why, such a thing did happen in Sada Kaka's own village. It wouldn't be proper to narrate the gruesome incident. But Sada Kaka, then a small boy, had seen it with his own eyes. It was a terrible shock. Often in later life, he remembered that event very vividly. He would then shut his eyes tight and squeeze his head in palms. He desperately wanted to forget it, but never could. Happily, he very narrowly escaped that gruesome eventuality.

Though thus spared a terrible indignity, Sada Kaka did not exactly have a proper and dignified funeral. After all a death is a solemn occasion. It is the end of a life's eventful pilgrimage. At that moment all bonds with other human beings are severed. It is a final farewell. It is but proper that friends and relatives should gather and shed a few tears and recount some fond memories. At least this much is due to everybody.

After a few hours they all disperse and get immersed in their own affairs. They hardly have time to remember the one who has passed away. May be there would be a few occasions when the man would be remembered. That is all.

Sada Kaka, a modest man, did not expect any thing more. He did hope, though, that his son would cherish his memory a little more. He wanted him to hang decorously a big photograph of his in the living room and garland it on every death anniversary. This is what is expected of a son and sons by and large do it out of a sense of propriety if not affection. But Sada Kaka's son did not do any of these things—no proper funeral, no photograph.

The son and everybody else were so preoccupied with the daughter-in-law's condition, that the funeral was perfunctory. Hardly anybody was informed of the death. One of Sada Kaka's daughters was settled in a distant town. She was informed far too late. In any case, the funeral couldn't wait for her. The

other daughter did come and shed a few tears. But that was all. A few neighbours took the matters in hand and completed the funeral rites. Sada Kaka certainly deserved better than this. But that was not to be.

Even the twelfth day after death was not observed with due solemnity. On that day all relatives gather and share a meal after the mantras are chanted. But the daughter-in-law continued to be ill and none had an inclination to observe all the proprieties with due ceremony. Sada Kaka's son would have hung his photograph in the living room. But the daughter-in-law had taken a fright of Sada Kaka's death. She had convinced herself that he had become a ghost and frightened her into an epileptic fit. That being her state of mind, it was dangerous to have Sada Kaka's photograph in the house.

Sada Kaka's son too had a grouse against him. On the day Sada Kaka died, his son was to appear for an interview for one of those highly lucrative jobs in the oil rich Gulf countries. He couldn't do that because of Sada Kaka's death and his wife's health. The opportunity of a life time was lost. Propriety and the need of the hour demanded that the son should cancel all engagements and stay at home on that day. Sada Kaka's son could never forgive him for choosing precisely that day to die. The son did not say so, but he thought it was wicked and mean. A father who has no influential connections that can land a good job for a son does give rise to resentment. To make matters worse Sada Kaka had refused on one occasion to give money to his son to put through a speculative and highly profitable deal. Sada Kaka did not like speculation, which in his view was a quick way of losing hard earned money. Well! A couple of hundred thousand could have been made, if Sada Kaka had given the money. But he didn't. His son considered these good enough reasons for nursing a grouse. As years went by and Sada Kaka's son continued to be only moderately well off, the grouse became entrenched and bitter.

By all normal standards Sada Kaka had been a good father. He had given his son a good education and left him as an

inheritance a house at Khar, a very decent suburb of Bombay. He had celebrated his son's marriage with due ceremony and given the daughter-in-law many gold ornaments. Moreover. . . but what is the use of recounting all this. For his son and daughter-in-law had decided firmly and finally to forget all the good things he did and remember him only as a nasty man, who was the cause of their misfortunes. The upshot was that there was not even a single memento of Sada Kaka in his own house, a house on which he had lavished so much loving care and expenditure.

Given a chance Sada Kaka could have convincingly refuted this misrepresentation of the things he did and the kind of man he was. At least he could have convinced others if not his son and his daughter-in-law. Alas being dead he could have no such chance, ever.

It was no doubt true that Sada Kaka could not adequately express his affection, though by all ordinary standards, he was an affectionate father. Yet this was what his son thought of him. Janu, a friend of Sada Kaka, was virtually a tyrant. He used to scold and berate his children all the time. When he lost his temper, which was often, he would throw anything at hand at his children or thrash them mercilessly. One would expect that children of such a father would hate him. Strangely, enough, they didn't. They certainly did not shower affection on him or seek his company. But they were extremely good natured and had mild temperaments. They would tolerate him patiently even after they grew up and earned their own living. Later Janu suffered a paralytic stroke. During the years he lay in bed paralyzed, Janu's sons took very good care of him. Janu, perverse, as he was, would scream at them angrily and berate them harshly. The worst part of it was that no body could make out a word of what he said out of the corner of his half paralyzed mouth. This used to drive him madder still. He was insufferable.

Yet after he died, Janu's sons got together and decided that they would not accept any inheritance out of their father's

property. Instead they donated all his property for starting a school in his original native village. To the villagers that was a boon. They named it after Janu. The school was lucky to have a very competent and devoted Headmaster. He developed it into a top ranking school in the district. Naturally everywhere the school is praised and everybody praises Janu too for giving a munificent donation to start such a wonderful school. Janu was certainly a lucky man, if there was one. Unfortunately Sada Kaka, though a much better man and a more affectionate father, had no such luck. Why, there wasn't even a photograph of the poor chap in his own house. That, it seems, is the way things work out

Sada Kaka being a tidy person was not in the habit of keeping any loose ends in his affairs. He had therefore noted down how his property was to be apportioned among his children and others on his death. The next step was to ask a lawyer to prepare a will. He wanted to entrust the work to a friend who was a senior and competent lawyer. But his nephew who had recently started legal practice offered to do it for him. Left to himself Sada Kaka would not have entrusted the work to his nephew. But youngsters in the family have to be encouraged, and supported by the elders. That is what all the relatives impressed on him and he reluctantly agreed to do so. The nephew promptly took away all the relevant documents and equally promptly abandoned the idea of practising independently as a lawyer. Instead he took up a job in the legal department of a big company. The nephew, thereafter, lost interest in preparing the will.

Sada Kaka reminded him several times to return all the documents. The young man assured to do so promptly, but never did it, as is the way of the younger generation. He had in all probability misplaced and lost the papers. Sada Kaka did not pursue the matter with any great urgency. His physician had assured him that he was in excellent health and had nothing to fear for another ten years. But death, whimsical as ever, claimed Sada Kaka within a month of this blithe assurance. It wasn't

Sada Kaka's fault that he died without leaving any title deeds to his property.

Sada Kaka's son searched frantically for the missing documents. He made equally frantic enquiries all around. He asked his cousin, who, he was told, was in some way involved in that affair. The cousin nodded and smiled and told him that he had returned the papers to Sada Kaka. When Sada's son expressed chagrin and annoyance, his cousin smiled even more and nodded sympathetically. It took one long year for the poor son to obtain copies and sort out matters relating to Sada Kaka's property.

That only sharpened his grouse against his father. He used to get particularly angry, when relations and friends of the family observed that things must have worked out smoothly in matters relating to Sada Kaka's property. After all, they observed, Sada Kaka was a very neat and tidy person.

Such remarks used to throw Sada Kaka's son into an ugly fit of temper. He would say, "Neat and tidy, my foot! Not a single document was in place. Everything had to be traced and sorted out. The effort took months and the tiresome work almost broke my back. That my father was a neat and tidy person was a big hoax, if ever there was one."

People were greatly surprised when they heard this. They would say, "Good Gracious! Is that so? How could we know any way? Sada Kaka would always proudly tell us that he was a very orderly person, and we naturally took him at his word. But it seems things were otherwise. That only goes to show, that no body can be trusted any more about anything at all."

If Sada Kaka could have heard this talk, he would have hit the ceiling. He would have very severely berated his nephew. He would have proved with convincing evidence that he wasn't at fault in this matter. But he just wasn't around. So people said all sorts of things about him. There was nothing to stop them.

So Sada Kaka was unjustly maligned. Moreover the property wasn't at all apportioned as he wanted to do. He had

three children—one son and two daughters. The son was reasonably well off. Moreover Sada Kaka wanted to give him the house, his most valuable asset. It wasn't necessary that he should get anything more. His elder daughter was pretty and had been married into a rich family. She lacked nothing. Moreover Sada Kaka didn't like her particularly, although he never admitted it even to himself. The elder daughter was a little selfish and abrasively assertive. Sada Kaka had decided that she should get a part of his wife's jewellery and nothing more. Sada Kaka's youngest daughter was pretty too. But she was shy and lacked self-assurance. As a result her good looks didn't quite impress those who saw her. Naturally she had been married into a family of modest means. She therefore needed more than the other children. She was also a very affectionate girl, who was particularly attached to Sada Kaka. He therefore always gave her gifts and wanted to leave a larger share of his property to her. Her son was a very sweet child. Sada Kaka liked him far more than his other grand children. His daughter-in-law had noticed this, as women do, and resented it very much.

This is how Sada Kaka wanted to apportion his property. But with no will in existence, quite the opposite happened. His son being the only male heir wanted to claim it all. In any case he had taken a lot of trouble to sort out matters. The daughters had done nothing. He, therefore, naturally felt that this circumstance reinforced his claim to the entire property. But Sada Kaka's elder daughter was a very assertive lady. She came down from Delhi in high dudgeon and made a terrible scene. She tore her brother into smithereens. She reduced the daughter-in-law to abject tears. At last unable to stand it any more the daughter-in-law brought the big box of jewellery and threw it at her. The elder daughter picked it up and was about to depart in a huff.

Sada Kaka's son cried in anguish, "Are you taking away all of it? What shall I tell the other sister when she comes? Leave something for her."

The elder daughter turned around in a flounce and cried, "Why should she get anything now? My father used to lavish on her gifts on every occasion. Her house must be choked with them."

But she decided to be generous. She opened the box, took out a piece of a jewellery of moderate value and gave it to her brother.

"All right", she said loftily, "give this to her. Let it not be said that I took everything and gave my younger sister nothing. She looks very modest and self denying. People always feel that an injustice is being done to her."

She flounced out a haughty swirl of her sari. The younger sister, however, never asked for anything. So the brother postponed giving her the piece of jewellery. He gave it as a gift on the occasion of his son's thread ceremony, which traditionally marks the commencement of a boy's education. Thus the expense on a gift was saved.

The box of jewellery had occasioned another unsavoury episode earlier. After Sada Kaka's death, his son once forgot to lock the cupboard in which the box was placed. This was noticed by the young maid servant who worked for the family.

The maid servant was rather attractive and she knew it. She draped her sari tightly around her to bring out the fullness of her bosom and hips. Her glances were bold and teasing while her talk was tinged with impertinence. Sada Kaka's daughter-in-law instinctively detested her and wanted to get rid of her.

Her husband, however, was tolerant. He would say, "But, dear, you know how difficult it is these days to get good domestic servants. They are all the same these days. She has been with us for some years and she does the work. That is more than one can expect these days."

The truth was that he found her attractive and liked to have her around. Had he got the guts, he would have boldly made advances. But he was timid and was content with the warm tingling sensation her presence aroused.

Strangely enough this maid used to be respectful towards

Sada Kaka and dutifully did whatever he wanted her to do. In fact, she cared for him and would apply the pain balm to his forehead when he had headache. Sada Kaka never gave her money or a small gift for what she did. Yet she looked after him like an obedient daughter.

After his death she became indifferent and rude as if a bond had been severed. Having seen that the cupboard was not locked, she was tempted to open it. In it she saw the box of jewellery. She opened it, more out of curiosity than with any evil intentions. When she saw the pile of jewellery in it, she was as if mesmerized. She couldn't take her eyes off it. She was not a thief. But she did want to have atleast one piece of jewellery for herself. She pondered and convinced herself that having taken such good care of Sada Kaka, she was entitled to it. She hurriedly took a necklace out of the box, hid it in the folds of her sari and quickly closed the cupboard.

The daugther-in-law did notice that a necklace was missing from the box of mother-in-law's jewellery. She thought, however, that Sada Kaka might have given it as a gift to the younger daughter. So she said nothing about the matter.

Having got hold of a necklace the maid couldn't resist the temptation to wear it. She had all along wanted to wear jewellery and show it off. After a discreet interval, she started wearing it.

Naturally everybody asked, "How come you have such an expensive necklace? Who gave it to you?"

Initially she gave some evasive replies. But people continued to ask probing questions. So she said, "An elderly sahib gave it to me because I took good care of him."

People responded with knowing smiles and said, "Aha! the old man must have been young at heart."

The maid had avoided wearing the necklace when she went to work at Sada Kaka's house. But once she forgot to be careful. The daughter-in-law immediately noticed the necklace and asked pointedly, "This looks very much like my mother-in-law's necklace. How did you get it?"

The maid was scared and confused. But she covered up her confusion and said, "Why, uncle gave it to me. I used to take such good care of him that he was pleased and gave it as a gift."

The daughter-in-law's eyes became as big as the bottom of a bowl. She asked, "What kind of things did you do for him that pleased him so much."

"Well! the usual things one has to do for an old man. Giving him pills, massaging his aching limbs, applying pain balm to his forehead," she said with a slight mocking smile. The implication was that the daughter-in-law had not done her duty of taking care of her father-in-law.

The daughter-in-law, however, read an altogether different and nasty meaning in that smile. She told her husband with considerable elaboration about this suspicious gift Sada Kaka's son was shocked. Expensive necklaces worn by one's wife were not given as gifts to maidservants. This was a highly fishy business. The son finally lost all respect for his father. He was also convinced that nobody ever follows the straight and narrow path. Everybody did all the wrong things, if he could get away with them.

The son was particularly chagrined that the old father had done what he had all along wanted to do. He decided to be bold and put his arms around the maid, when he found her alone. She pushed him aside and said contemptuously, "Don't you dare! I am not that sort of woman."

That was the end of the son's bold misadventure. The humiliation was complete when the maid told his wife about his misbehaviour. He had a lot of explaining to do. He thought of various explanations, but none seemed good enough to stick Finally he hit upon the right one. He worked up righteous indignation and said, "That maid is a liar. I confronted her with the true story of her relations with my father. I threatened to expose her in the presence of our relations and friends. She is trying to whitewash the affair throwing mud at me."

His wife told the story to a friend of hers. Thereafter the story got around very quickly. People gossiped about it with great relish. They said in shocked tones, "We never could imagine that Sada Kaka who wore such saintly looks was such a wicked old rascal."

Poor Sada Kaka! He had not in his long life even touched any woman other than his wife. Not that he didn't have any wild dreams as a young man. He would have liked to have a juicy little affair. But he was so timid that nothing of that sort could happen. In mature years, he became a pillar of social morality. He would wax eloquent over how the country was going to dogs because of fall in moral standards. It was greatly unfair and cruel that his name was tarnished by a canard such as this.

The story of jewellery took quite another twist in Delhi, where the elder daughter lived. There was a theft in her house after a few years and the box of jewellery was stolen. One of the thieves gave a big necklace out of it to his girl friend. Thus the necklace worn by generations of devout Hindu wives came to be worn by a woman of easy virtue, when entertaining her amorous guests. What a thing to happen to a deeply cherished heirloom of devout and faithful Hindu wives!

Quite another twist of fortune did something totally different. Sada Kaka had an idol of Ganapati in black stone, which his father had brought back from a place of pilgrimage. The old man used to worship it with an elaborate pooja every morning after his bath. Sada Kaka was not at all a devout person. But out of respect for his father, Sada Kaka had continued to perform the pooja though rather perfunctorily and without much devotion. Lord Ganapati had not showered any particular blessings on Sada Kaka; nor, it must be conceded, had Ganapati done him any harm. Ganapati, in fact, was not the principal deity of the family at all. It was one of the deities, also worshipped.

It so happened that Sada Kaka's younger daughter took it away to keep and worship as a memento of her father, whom

she had loved dearly. As it was a stone idol, not of much value, it was most generously given to her by her brother and his wife. The younger daughter being very devout, worshipped it with elaborate pooja every morning. Ganapati who had not responded to his worship by two generations by showering any blessings on them seems to have suddenly decided to make amends for being remiss all those years. The younger daughter's husband quite unexpectedly inherited a couple of lakhs of rupees from his uncle. The uncle being a widower used to live alone. His daughters, married into good families, used to neglect him. Sada Kaka's younger daughter, being kind-hearted, used to look after him. She would invite him to eat with the family on festive occasions. She also took care of the old man when he was ill. Eventually the old man died while on a pilgrimage. His lawyer invited Sada Kaka's daughter to be present when he read out the will. She was quite surprised and felt a little guilty when she learnt that she was the major beneficiary of the old man's will.

Sada Kaka's daughter instead of claiming the inheritance as a just reward for the affectionate care of the old man, gave the the credit entirely to Lord Ganapati. She said that her father was a devout man and Ganapati had bestowed on her the reward of his devotion. This considerably raised the status of that idol of Ganapati amongst her relations and neighbours. They would visit her house and ask for Ganapati's blessings on critical occasions in their lives. They vowed to observe fasts and perform elaborate poojas with various expensive rituals, if their wishes were granted. It seems that the kind-hearted Ganapati granted many of them their wishes and he acquired quite a wide following.

Any other person in the place of Sada Kaka's daughter would not have allowed all and sundry to benefit from the kindness of a family deity. But being a nice person she did not mind. Eventually, an ambitious politician in the neighbourhood came to know of Ganapati's extraordinary powers. So when he stood for election, he visited Sada Kaka's daughter's house with

a large band of followers. They all bowed to Lord Ganapati very devoutly indeed and the politician vowed to perform a big public pooja, if he won the election. So powerful were the blessings of Ganapati that they frustrated the wiles and evil designs of the opposing candidates, and the devout politician was elected. True to his vow, the successful politician performed a huge public pooja with the accompaniment of chanting of mantras by numerous priests, and music of the auspicious shehnai. He presented a miniature temple made of solid silver in which the Ganapati idol could be placed and worshipped with proper decorum.

When the politician returned home, after fulfilling his vow, he received a phone call from the State capital. He was told to rush to the capital to be sworn in as a minister. The poor chap was overwhelmed. He rushed back to Sada Kaka's daughter's house and fell at the Ganapati's feet several times in devout obeisance. His band of followers did likewise. It soon became an epidemic of obeisance. The Commissioner of Police rushed to the spot to control the pandemonium. He however did not overlook doing his obeisance before ordering the police force to stand guard and maintain order.

There was naturally a bit of wild talk about the extraordinary powers of this particular Ganapati. This was no ordinary idol of Ganapati. The divine Ganapati himself, it seemed, resided in that idol. Only extraordinary devotion and long years of devout worship could have induced the divine Ganapati to do so. Who, people asked, was that holy man who by his devotion had persuaded divine Ganapati to descend from the heavens and make his abode on this sinful earth?

All the folks wanted to give credit to Sada Kaka's daughter. She, however, was a very modest woman. She attributed this miracle to her father, who, she told everybody, was a very virtuous man and a great devotee of Ganapati. Hearing that everybody clamoured for a photograph of that virtuous devotee. It was fished out with considerable difficulty, put inside a silver frame and placed modestly in front of the

idol of Ganapati. Thereafter everybody, who came to worship Ganapati, did not fail to put a few flowers on the photograph of Sada Kaka. He soon came to be recognized as a saint.

All this was quite hard on Sada Kaka's daughter and her family. They couldn't possibly live in a house, which was always full of a noisy throng which treated it as public property. Some brash chaps even went so far as to suggest that they should quit the house and stop being an obstacle in the way of the devotees.

The newly appointed minister, however, came to their rescue. He saw to it that a large piece of land with an excellent location was given at a nominal price to build a temple for this Ganapati. Donations poured in and a large impressive temple of marble and blackstone was built. The idol of Ganapati was installed in it with elaborate ceremony and ritual. He insisted that an enlarged photograph of Sada Kaka in a decorative silver frame be installed in the inner sanctum at the feet of Ganapati. He also got his own name carved on a marble plaque at the entrance of the temple. His followers installed in the temple a photograph of their leader in an attitude of devout obeisance.

A house was built for Sada Kaka's daughter on a piece of land adjoining the temple and her family was entrusted with the care of the temple and worship of Lord Ganapati.

Sada Kaka would have been quite taken aback if he could have seen all this. He would have felt annoyed, if not outraged, to find himself worshipped as a saint. He was not by any means a devout man. It fact, as a young man he had been quite impressed by iconoclastic articles of Savarkar and had proudly claimed that he was an atheist. He had mellowed over the years and after his father's death even performed pooja out of respect for his memory. But that was about all. He had never been the follower of any Godman or taken vows and performed elaborate rituals. He had been all along a sceptic. Had he been alive, he would have insisted that his photograph be removed from the temple. But being dead he

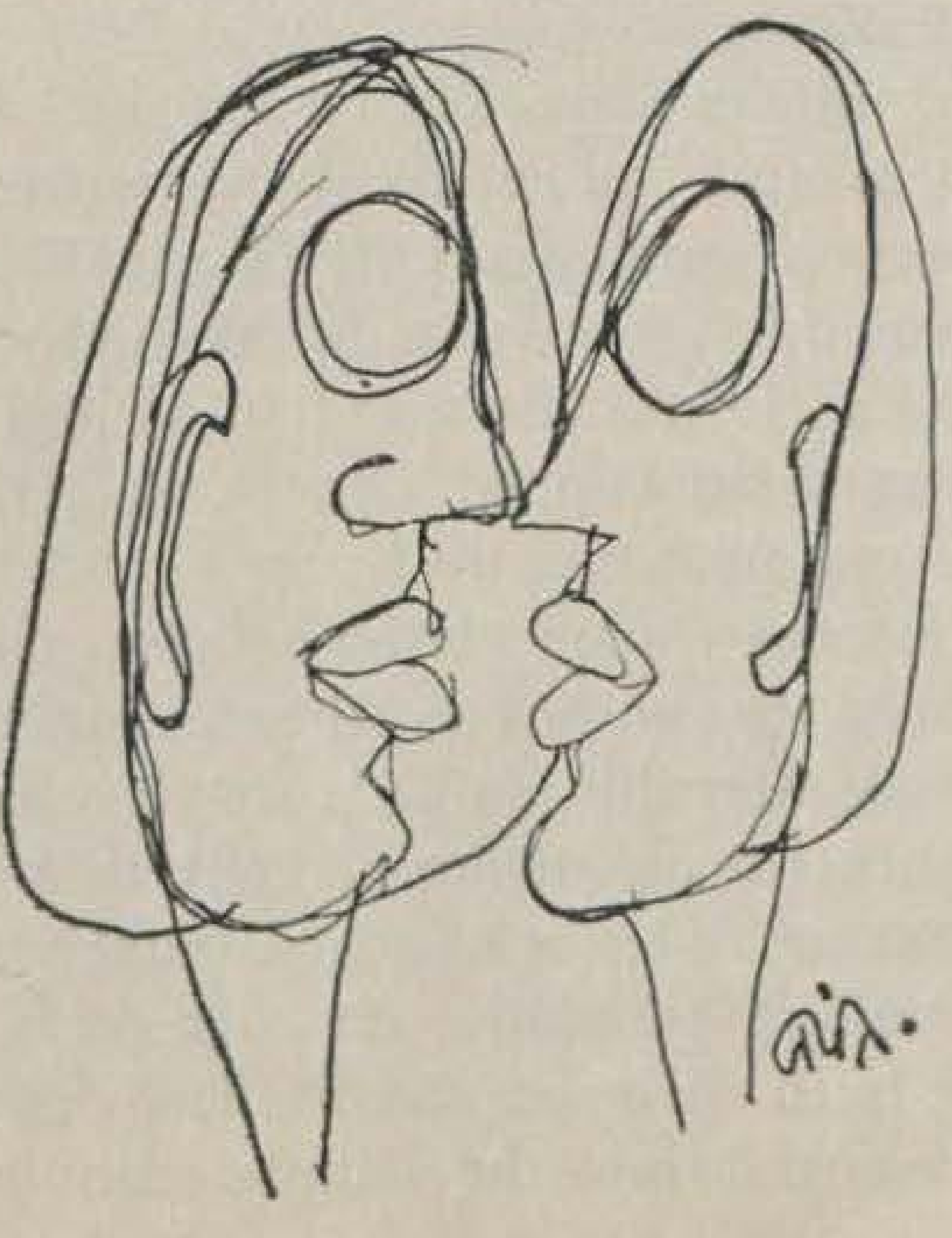
could do nothing about it. One wonders, if he could have changed the situation, even if he were alive.

Sada Kaka's son was exasperated no end by all these developments and particularly the deification of his father. He tried to tell the truth about his father, as he saw it. Nobody would listen to him. When he persisted, he got angry, threatening letters from the devotees. Sada Kaka's elder daughter was terribly jealous. She visited her sister and made a big scene. She wanted to share the glory and the numerous benefits. She too could not prevail against the strong wave of public sentiment. In their eyes the younger daughter was the true title holder of the saintly inheritance.

Such things happened and events took turn this way and that after Sada Kaka's death. This of course is not the entire story or even the end of the story. Events have continued to proliferate and take turns this way and that. But that continues to happen all the time and none can do anything about it.

"Asen Ani Tasen" 1982

Translated from Marathi by the author



Curfew

JAYANT K. BISWAL

ABINASH was terribly frightened. He cautiously opened the window and peeped through its small opening. There was no one on the road save some rifle-wielding policemen casually moving from one end to the other. Bright yellow light from the big halogen lamps above sparkled on the black surface of the road like a funeral fire burning in a dark night.

Abinash moved his eyes for a moment and then closed the window. He took a deep breath and whispered to his wife, "Sumana, the condition is very serious. For three days the curfew has been clamped, yet there is no improvement. It may explode any moment. Remember, before evening you must close all the doors and windows of the house and put out all lights. And ask Babu to stay indoors. How are we concerned with these disturbances!"

Sumana came out of the kitchen and anxiously asked, "How long will this curfew continue? How long shall we live like frightened animals? We can't even go out to get vegetables."

Abinash replied, with a sort of confidence, "Oh, bear this for a few more days. These boys will automatically quieten down once a few are thrown in the police lock-up and given a good thrashing."

But Sumana almost revolted, "What? Send them to lock-up? Police in cold blood killed the boys and no one spoke for them.

Now if the boys speak against that, they will be thrown into jails and beaten up!"

Abinash lifted his finger to his mouth, indicating her to be silent and whispered.

"Eh, don't speak so loudly. Intelligence people are everywhere. If they get the slightest scent of what you are speaking here, well, the next day get prepared to go to Koraput or Phulbani."

His wife snapped: "Who is going to be always afraid of this transfer? Should we always keep our mouths sealed and our hearts closed for this hell-tranfer?"

"Ah, leave that wisdom of yours. You think, transfer is as easy as visiting your sister's house! So many things to carry—fridge, T.V., steel almirah, furniture and four jersey cows to Koraput! And you think, on your arrival you can get a five R quarters just close to the market as you have here! Will you even get a two room hovel on rent in Koraput?"

"Yet, people are going to Koraput on transfer."

"Ah, how are we concerned with others? There are still people who do not at all go from the capital. Do you realise, dear, once we go from this place the house that we are building will never be completed. And the little extra money that I get from examination papers or from tabulation will no more come. And here, since I have the chance to meet publishers, I can get my books published. Some royalty also comes from that. Do you think you can get all these facilities in those remote interiors like Koraput or Phulbani?"

"Who is dying for these things? They kill innocent children like animals and no one dare speak against them!"

"Innocent? Who are innocent? That sort of boys ought to be killed. You go to study in the college. Why do you poke your nose in all sorts of disturbances? Those boys deserve it."

Sumana was almost on the verge of tears, she cried, "How can you speak so cruelly? Have you no feelings? Think about the parents of those children."

Abinash fell silent, he spoke to himself: was he not really

touched by the tragedy? Is he not aware that it was nothing but brutal murder by police and hired hoodlums? But he did not have the courage to say so. He was afraid, his confidential report would be spoilt, he would be transferred And leaving this capital city, he could never reconcile himself to.

But he used to rationalise his cowardice. He would comfort himself. "How am I responsible for them? They deserved it for what they had done. If they died, what is it to me?"

He was consoling himself thus when Sumana asked him, "The college students had come for contribution to their strike, did you contribute?"

Displaying a triumphant smile Abinash said, "Ha, ha, I gave them, but asked them not to fill my name on the coupon. Ha, ha, you must be here, you must be there, but actually nowhere. Being a government servant, what right have we to speak against the government?"

"But that means government will do as it pleases and all must put up with it like cowards."

"Cowards" stung Abinash's ego. He retorted, "Police is not blind that it puts a lens on its eyes and then singles out innocents and kills them. These days people have become so arrogant that police is badly needed for them."

He knew that there was no truth in what he said. He remembered how some days before an appeal had came out in the press, addressed to the élite—teachers, writers, lawyers to protest against the brutal police killings. Some leaders of the Action Committee had also come to him to get his signature on a memorandum to be submitted to the government. But he put them off with the plea that as a government servant he could not do so. And the poet they spoke about, well, poets are normally very tender, delicate. They do not like to involve themselves in such problems. But how pathetic and pitiable he then sounded, even to himself!

He wondered what he could have done. Tomorrow, again, there will be the Staff Council. Some young teachers are planning to move a resolution condoling the death of the students and

condemning the reign of terror unleashed by the police. But the Principal has already cautioned that participating in such a move, even the innocuous move of condoling the death, would amount to encouraging anti-government elements and would warrant punitive action. Tomorrow, it is surely going to be an explosive Staff Council.

He murmured, Hell with that Council. How does it affect him? He is not that foolish to be unnecessarily sentimental, like those young adolescents over an issue that is dead and gone. The boys are dead and they reaped what they had sown. What is there to feel sorry and protest about?

The next day it was almost evening when he returned from the Council. After one hour curfew would again be clamped in the city. He was now walking faster and faster. And the moment he reached his house, he closed all the doors and windows and put out all the lights. Only a dim twenty five watt bulb cast its pale light in the gathering darkness

On the road mikes fitted atop police patrol jeeps blared the timings of the curfew and cautioned people to stay indoors.

Abinash had heard in the college that there were again some disturbances, riots and firing in some parts of the city. Two or three students had lost their lives and many more had been injured. The whole city was tense with fear and anger.

Abinash knew when it was dark there would surely be violence. God only knows what would happen. And whatever happened, he knew his house would never be safe, it was just on the main square.

He was annoyed. Resigned, he went to his room and wanted to forget the outer world. He would better devote his time to writing some poems for the special Puja issues of various magazines.

He asked Sumana for a cup of coffee and glanced over some unfinished poems that he had started in the morning. He thought that if his poetry collection came out soon from the press, it could be sent to the Akademi for nomination for award this year.

When Sumana brought the coffee, Abinash was busy writing some lines. Sumana handed over the coffee and anxiously said, "Babu has not come yet. It is already evening. . ."

Abinash started, jerked from the reverie : the curfew would soon commence and Babu had not yet returned!

Sumana anxiously pleaded, "Please go at once and find him. It is getting dark and God knows where he is. . ."

Abinash looked at the distraught face of his wife. Anxiety and fear, like dark, nimbus clouds covering the whole sky from one end to the other, soon spread across his whole face. He began to tremble and sweat. After some moments he stealthily opened the window.

Through the window Abinash saw the road. On the farther side stood a vast sea of people and on this side police vans, wireless jeeps and lines and lines of military police with helmets on their heads and rifles slung from their shoulders.

Abinash was struck with disbelief. Within this half an hour so many things have happened here. Not the slightest sound, not the least movement except the beating of iron plates of the police boots against the hard, metallic road. The atmosphere was quiet but tense like a terrible storm gathering around its centre in a dark ocean.

Abinash was afraid. Did Babu get trapped in that vast, silent, seething crowd?

Just at this moment the police mike blared its warning to the people to withdraw from that place within five minutes.

The people did not withdraw; they advanced, advanced step by step. The helmeted, lathi-holding, rifle-wielding police force took positions. It was dreadfully quiet, awaiting the sudden explosion.

Just at this moment Sumana stretched her hand through the window and pointing it in the direction of the road cried, "Look, look, our Babu there. . ." Then she held the hands of her husband and cried, "Please go quickly and bring him back."

Looking in that direction Abinash stood stupefied. Babu was standing in the front row in the crowds, with him many

boys of his age, pushing, jerking, advancing.

Abinash was stunned and he stood there like a stone. Sumana fell at his feet, crying to bring back her son at once.

Abinash looked at the road and helplessly answered, "How can I go there?. . . the police cordon . . ."

Sumana broke into violent sobs. Abinash was still looking at the road, completely frozen.

Police mike announced for the last time that unless the people withdrew within two minutes, force would be applied.

But the people stood there, defiant. The officer, raising his hand above, was looking at his watch and marking time.

Suddenly, on an impulse, Abinash flung open the door and ran towards the road, with no slippers on his feet and his hand clutching the crumpled bundle of the poetry manuscript.

In no time he reached the police cordon. Some two or three small stones landed near the police. Suddenly the officer lowered his hand and shouted "Charge!"

Within a moment the police force surged forward. There were sounds of people running, falling, crying. It was as if an ocean was churned at its core.

People ran. The quiet evening resounded with cries of pain. And some boys groaning in pain were lying on the road, their bones broken and their flesh fallen to pieces.

Suddenly Abinash saw before him Babu falling to the blow of a policeman. He broke the cordon and ran toward his son.

A policeman caught hold of him. Abinash cried and prayed out of desperation, "My son, my son lying there. . ."

The policeman gave out a loud, devilish laugh and shouted, "You bastard, you've come here to demonstrate a father's love! Why did that scoundrel of your son come here?"

Abinash was dumbfounded. He was aghast at the sight of his son groaning in immense pain just four or five metres away from him.

At this moment another policeman noticing the crumpled sheets of paper in his hand, demanded, "What are those papers?"

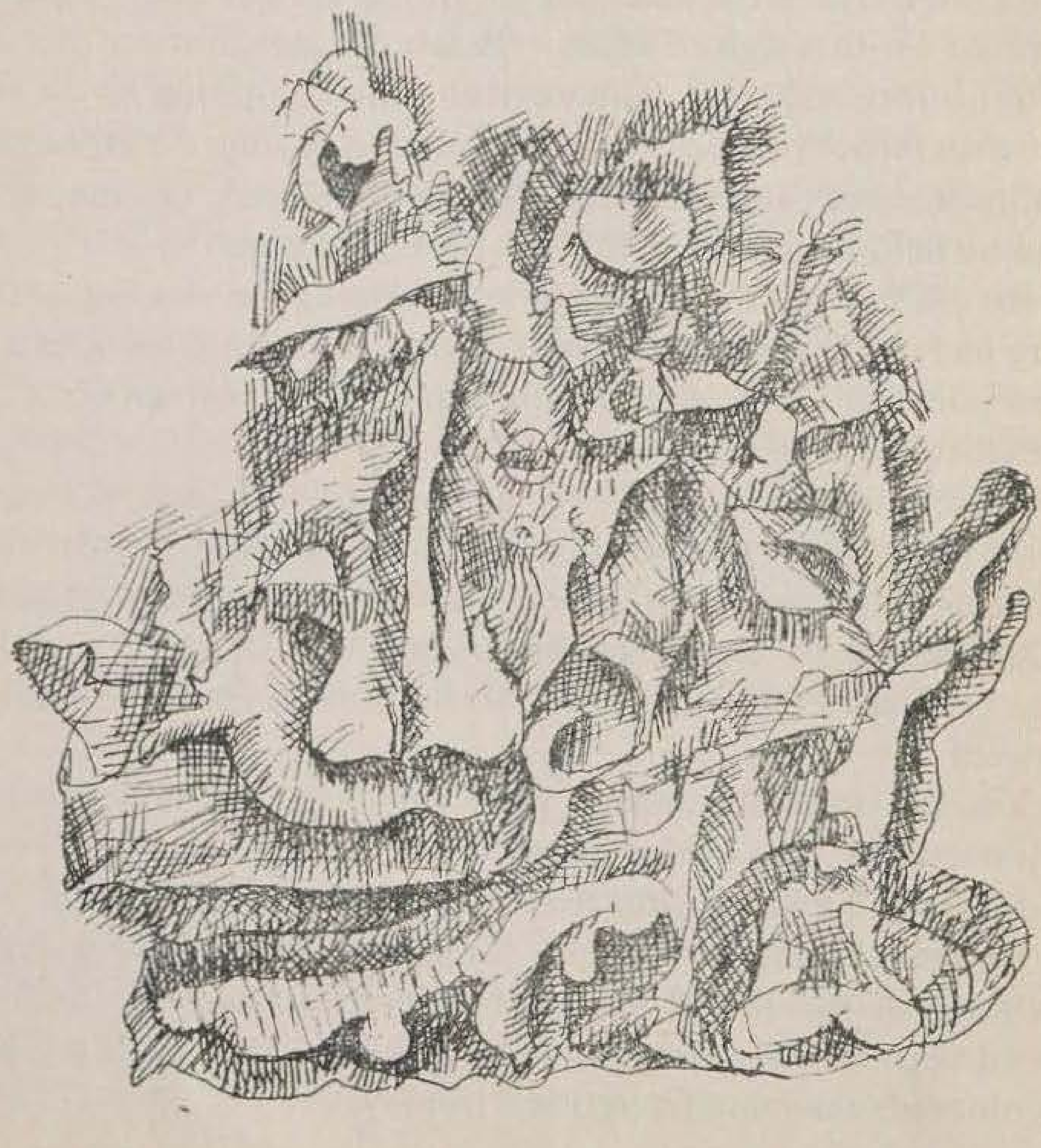
Abinash mumbled, "They are. . . they are my poems." Then he paused and again prayed, "Please allow me to go to my son."

The policeman snatched the papers from his hand and tore them to pieces and shouted, "You old fox! You are distributing pamphlets here!"

Then he addressed some of his colleagues, "Throw this old rascal into the van. One night in the lock-up would teach him all about pamphlets."

Abinash saw before him barely a couple of metres away his own son writhing in agony like a faint shadow trembling on the lone, dark road.

Translated from Oriya by the author



The Umbrella

K. SUBRAHMANYAM

PADMANABHAM emerged out of the crowds at the market-place with a sigh of relief. Beads of perspiration trickled down his face and back. The weather was sweltering as the sun beat with ferocity. He cursed the hot morning. Yet, on one arm his hooked umbrella dangled as he walked. In the other hand he held a hand-bag stuffed with vegetables.

He did not use the handy umbrella though it was hot. The thing had its purpose to serve, for it was the monsoon season. "Can one ever know when it will rain or death will come . . .so unpredictable!" he mused.

As he walked along the edge of the road, he suddenly looked up. The sunlight was fast diminishing as dark clouds were gathering together from every side. Somewhere a thunder sounded as if to challenge his umbrella which shook on his arm. He hastily opened it to shield himself from the coming showers.

Yes, the umbrella was of his own age. He now recalled with nostalgia the tender care with which his late father had used it, in sun and rain, for over two decades. It had withstood the ravages of time very well, though its mast had weakened, becoming shaky. It still bore the brunt of the wind-filled tuffeta-spread that pulled during violent weather. The cloth too had discoloured, changing from black to grey.

Within moments the rain came down with gusto. It soon whipped into a frenzy of heavy showers. He knew that the umbrella could never again withstand such onslaughts. As the wind increased in velocity, it became a struggle for him to hold on to the umbrella. The whizzing wind appeared to threaten to blow the thing away, him too!

He quickly snapped it shut and ran for the shelter of a nearby porch. As he reached the shelter he put the umbrella on the floor along with the bag. He stood gaping at the forming mist enveloping the visibility around. The rumbling thunder with occasional flashes in the sky presented a formidable spectacle. A terrible rain! . . .he exclaimed inwardly.

His thoughts hovered on his umbrella again. Could he afford a new one from his meagre income? If only he took proper care of the thing and used it sparingly, perhaps it could still serve him for a few more seasons. The monsoon would be over within a month and he need not worry after that.

The road-side culverts were filled in with rain-water and were overflowing in no time. He chuckled to himself at the sheer waste of heaven-sent water so precious to people. A few hundred miles away was the catchment area from where the city got its water supply but this season, due to scant rain in that region the reservoirs were just half-full. This accounted for the restricted water-supply. He saw sheets 'of crystal-clear waters that thudded to the earth were draining away and it reminded him of flushing the city of its toilets! Perhaps, he mused, Nature too wanted to have its fun! The wasteful rain also spoiled the business and the outings of the citizens!

He had no particular work to do, it was his weekly-off. That was a solace, he smiled to himself.

The rain began abating.

"So happy! Must be some good news, eh?" a voice nearby disturbed him out of his reverie.

He turned round to see an elderly man grinning at him. That was Ramayya, the pleader his late father had known. He stood rubbing his wet pate vigorously as he explained his plight

to Padmanabham. He had to take shelter under a tiny porch of a shop across the road where he got drenched. Of course, not to talk of the substantial proportions that could never find a wider shelter for that matter, was it? Padmanabham chuckled.

"What makes you laugh so merrily? Blast it, man! Do you think these showers would ever let go? If this continues for long, God alone help us!" Ramayya held both his hands up to heaven.

"The rain ought to stop some time, Sir!" put in Padmanabham.

"Pst!. . .I did a mistake in not bringing my rain-coat with me," said the pleader despondently.

Padmanabham kept his silence. Ramayya appeared brooding over some problem of his own.

An hour passed. . . .

The mist had partly cleared to reveal some patches of the blue sky. It brought hope to the stranded people.

Ramayya cast furtive glances at the umbrella and its owner alternately. He cleared his throat.

"Look, Paddu! Now is the time for us to get away. Only a mere drizzle, isn't it? You know I have work to do and of course you too must be having something or other to do at home. Why waste hours here? Why don't we start now?"

Padmanabham felt as if he was kicked on the back. How on earth could he dare use his umbrella in such heavy rain? He was in no hurry and why must he venture out?

"Not in this weather. If you please, Sir, my umbrella isn't really in a good condition," he stammered pleadingly.

"Nonsense! Imagine a young and energetic man like you giving lame excuses! As for the precious umbrella, rest assured nothing will spoil it. Will you pick up your bag? Give me that thing. I will handle it for you."

Ramayya did not wait for an answer. He took the umbrella, opened it and held it over his head as he walked out of the porch to the main road. Padmanabham hurriedly picked up

his bag, to follow behind.

Padmanabham cursed himself. Ramayya's bulk did not leave an inch of space to squeeze in. Even to protect his head Padmanabham had to bend lower as Ramayya's short stature held the canopy just over his own. In the crouching position staying as nearer as he could, Padmanabham walked. The drizzle became steadier and he was getting wet.

"That's better, Paddu!" said Ramayya encouragingly, without turning back to see the predicament of the owner of the umbrella.

So, they trudged on the slippery mud path along the edge of the road while the rain increased into a crescendo.

Now it dawned on Padmanabham that he was a fool to be inveigled into this. But, could he dare act otherwise? Ramayya was well-known and was respected in the town. Some said he had an uncanny way of winning cases in the small causes court. How far it was true he could not know before but now he became sure of it. The manner in which he was outwitted and dragged into the showers to be drenched and deprived of the shelter of his own umbrella did prove the pleader's wiles.

The duo walked in the rain, for several hours thought Padmanabham, the victor striding comfortably under the canopy while the victim crouching just behind him in full expose of the Nature's wrath. As if to add fuel to the fire, Ramayya merrily chatted away, recounting some odd experiences that he had during his past adventures into the rain. Padmanabham had to bear the discomfiture of trudging in stooping posture upon the path punctuated with puddles of rain and slush.

Though it had taken in all twenty minutes, at one time Padmanabham felt that they would never reach home for long. He was fully soaked and his frail body shook with cold shiver. But the agony at last seemed to end, as they neared the journey's end.

On reaching the cross-lanes, they halted. Ramayya turned aside to express his astonishment.

"You are drenched! I say, why don't you get rid of this useless thing? Look at my sides. I am also drenched!"

"It's all right, Sir!" mumbled Padmanabham. "My house is over there in the next street. May I take your kind leave?"

"One moment, Paddu!" said Ramayya with a halting gesture.

"You may want your umbrella back. Sure! I shall send it to you soon after I reach home. Good-bye!"

Not wasting a moment, Ramayya turned away.

At last, Padmanabham reached home without his precious umbrella. He knocked on the door with a sense of urgency and it opened immediately. There at the threshold stood his wife staring at her husband with disbelief.

Her look made him uneasy and guilty. How could he relate to her the episode of the umbrella? Instead, he merely explained:

"You know Mr. Ramayya, the pleader? He has borrowed the umbrella. Don't worry! He said he would return it today."

The wife understood; though she appeared to be suppressing her anger, did not utter a word.

The day passed without the return of the umbrella to its owner.

The following day, on way back from office in the evening, Padmanabham went straight to the residence of Ramayya to retrieve his thing. He climbed three steps leading to the veranda of the old building. Four empty chairs were there. No clients? He was wrong there. The pleader's chamber to the right side had a curtain hung at its door and emanating from within he heard voices of people. Undoubtedly, one was the pleader's and the other must be some client's pleading for a missing something. Padmanabham moved near the door to hear what was going on.

Ramayya's voice rose in high pitch.

"I know how you feel. How long ago you say? Oh. . . three days now but you clean forgot to pick it up sooner. Too bad! But, couldn't you at least send someone over the next day?

You could have got it back then, I tell you. Some people do leave their personal belongings here either in haste or inadvertently. Someone else may point out and only then do I notice the thing left behind. How can people expect me to keep track of their things?"

"I didn't mean it, Sir!" agreed the other meekly. "The point is it's a newly bought umbrella. Otherwise. . ."

The client's voice trailed off as Ramayya's cut in sharply—

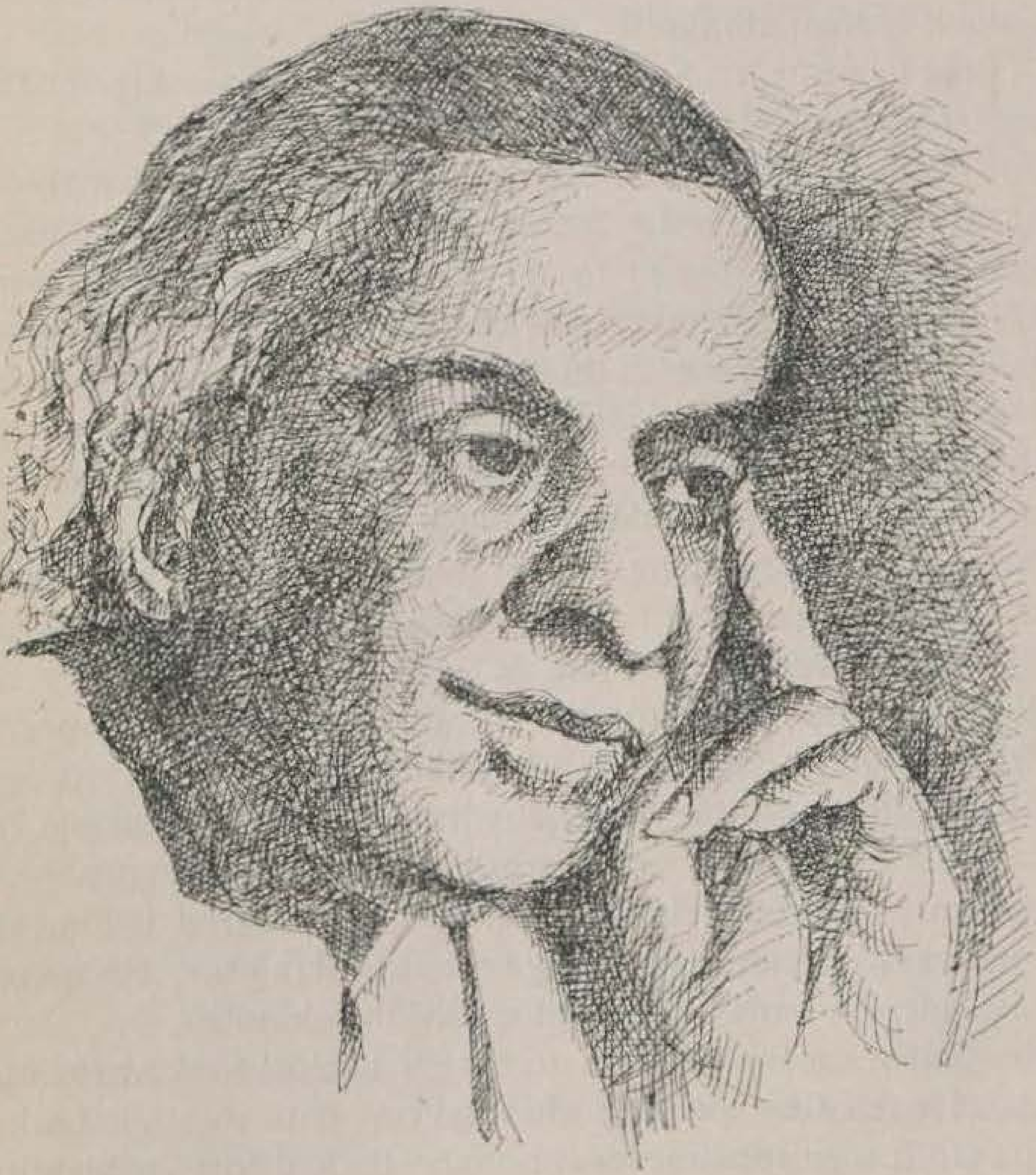
"I myself had owned a brand new umbrella not long back. You know what happened to it? It simply vanished from my sight. In this very chamber! Well, I didn't worry much about the loss, what with people thronging the place, because it was my own carelessness. Enough of these umbrellas! Ah, that reminds me! Why didn't I think of it earlier? You notice that decrepit piece of an umbrella lying over there at the door corner? It has been lying there since yesterday I believe. I expect that its owner will soon make his appearance to ask for it. Or else you know what. . ."

Ramayya suddenly stopped in mid-sentence and gaped at the figure slithering into his chamber unannounced. It was that of Padmanabham himself who, after overhearing the utterances of Ramayya and unable to control his anguish, had rushed into the room in desperation. He peered behind the door and easily located the thing he was looking for. He quietly took it and with bent head crept out of the chamber.

He halted on the veranda to take a careful look at the umbrella. He felt like weeping aloud! For, with its stick broken and its cloth torn into pieces the umbrella had lost its identity!

Still he carried the thing with him and as he was stepping down the veranda, Ramayya's chilling comment reached his ears as a parting pat : "Here is another case of chap blowing in for his missing article. He comes unannounced! No courtesy! You would have doubted my word, if you did not see just now exactly as I had described, about the goings on in the name of missing belogings. Oh, People!"

Translated from Telugu by the author



Raja Rao
1988 Neustadt Prize Winner

"I write for myself"

RAJA RAO TELLS RANAVIR RANGRA

Rangra We often hear that one can express better in one's mother-tongue rather than in any other language. But you chose to adopt English as the medium of expression for your creative writing. What was it that led you to make this choice ?

Raja Rao I would have liked to express myself in Sanskrit. It is the richest language in the world. It is a most sophisticated language. You can use it, play with it in the way you like. But I am afraid, my Sanskrit is not good enough. Though my mother-tongue was Kannada, I was brought up in Hyderabad. So my Kannada was not good either. I did not think it sufficient for my intellectual perversities. So I needed some language that I knew better than Kannada and that was English. I have tried to reshape the English language for my own needs. I refuse to write English like an Englishman or an American. Therefore, my English is, as people have said, rather unusual. I try to be authentic with regard to what I write. When I come to talk of France, very often I think in French and when I talk of Mysore, I think in Kannada and when I talk of Delhi, I love to think in Hindi, though my Hindi is

not good. I think, it is a question of what you want to express, and how sincerely you want to express.

Rangra When you write on Indian subjects, particularly about your native country, you must be, as you say, thinking originally in Kannada and translating mentally from Kannada to English. Is that not a cumbersome process ?

Raja Rao But I write very little about my own native Mysore. It was only in the beginning that I wrote some short stories about Karnataka. I have written mostly about northern India and Europe or America.

Rangra Do you have any particular type of readers in view when you write in English on Indian topics ?

Raja Rao I have no readers in view at all. I write for myself.

Rangra That is, to express yourself, to give full expression to what you want to convey.

Raja Rao I take writing as a *sadhana*, a spiritual *sadhana*. That is why I write so little and take a long time to complete my text.

Rangra This reminds me of *Srimadbhagwadgita* which elevates literary *sadhana* to the level of *tapa*, calling it *vangmaya tapa*. Do you write in long hand or you generally give dictation ?

Raja Rao I used to write in long hand, but because of poor health I lie in bed. I have a small table and I put my typewriter on it. My first writings were mostly written in long hand. *Kanthapura* and the short stories were written in long hand.

Rangra Coming to your novels—*Kanthapura*, *The Serpent and the Rope* and *Comrade Kirillov*—I find they are in first person singular, the narrator being "I". From this, I gather that there must be some autobiographical element in them. Let us take Moorthy of *Kanthapura*. How much autobiographical element

does he have ?

Raja Rao I like to write in first person singular, because I find it much more sincere. Gandhiji used to say, you can lie to someone else, but you can't lie to yourself, you have to be sincere to yourself. I think, that is the reason why I write in the first person singular. But this "I" is not always autobiographical. During the freedom movement, I was not in India, I was in Europe. Once Nehru asked me, "Where were you in prison?" "I was never in prison," I replied. So only something of me is there in the novel.

Rangra Now, let us discuss two main female characters of your novels, say Madeleine of *The Serpent and the Rope* and Irene of *Comrade Kirillov*. Both these women, as these novels go, love their husbands very much but the husbands, Rama and Kirillov are almost silent on this issue and appear dispassionate to their wives. Perhaps, this non-responsive attitude of theirs creates doubts in the minds of these two ladies. Madeleine decides to free Rama to marry an Indian woman as she thinks he would be happier with an Indian wife. Irene also does not approve of Kirillov's double standards. She is sure that the moment Kirillov touches his land India, he will start hating Europe. She is sure that he hates Europe and yet he talks of internationalism. She hopes their son Kamal will love the whole of the humanity. Does it mean that the Indians, despite their concept of the *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (The whole world is their family) cannot prove to be the worthy husbands of their European wives ?

Raja Rao The Indian depth of sensibility the European does not usually have. So in a certain sense, any marriage outside one's own background creates problems. I would say that problems are many, say, thinking, eating, sleeping—all have their own particular ways.

We are a very highly sophisticated race of people which often the best of Europeans do not have. In terms of living, we may not seem so, whereas in terms of thinking we are highly sophisticated. So when we begin to have a dialogue with a European woman at the intellectual level, we may like it, but it is not as easy to live it. Even in India today, marrying beyond one's community or State creates problems, because the backgrounds are so different. Much more difficult it would be to marry a woman from a far away country, say in Europe. The Indians suddenly take marriage as a dharma. But unless you have a full understanding, dharma is only on one side. The woman may not think in terms of our dharma She would think in the sense of her dharma, in terms of her own background.

Rangra May be because of this that Rama of *The Serpent and the Rope* says that one should not only wed a woman, but should also wed her God. In both these novels, we know only the woman's reaction in terms of love, but their husbands remain silent on this important issue.

Raja Rao There is a difference between a man and a woman. A man, particularly the South Indian, is a very austere person. We are not very sentimental. Rama is very much an Indian and a South Indian. He is always rather distant.

Rangra It appears, Rama's attitude of distantness was sensed by Madeleine. That is why, despite her earlier confessions that she loved him, she questions herself, "Do I love him?"

Raja Rao That is very European too. Though she was sure of her love, she doubted it. In the West, people doubt themselves a great deal. They are never too sure. They are sure in the beginning, but they are not sure later on.

Rangra Why was it that Madeleine took a decision to free Rama to marry another woman? Rama does not appear to give any cause for this.

Raja Rao This question, which you have asked me, has already been asked fifty times. The question is that in a marriage with such delicacies, separatism comes from a deeper level than its mere expression. Many things in life are done without any rhyme or reason.

Rangra Would you say that they are done on intuition ?

Raja Rao No, even deeper than intuition.

Rangra What is your concept of love. We come across such a definition in the novel : "To be free one is to know he is free, beyond the body and beyond the mind, to love one is to know one is love and to be pure one is to know one is purity." Here, I am interested in your concept of love. Will you please elaborate on this with reference to Rama and Madeleine ?

Raja Rao This concept is of *Advaita Vedānta*. Love is beyond Rama and Madeleine. Love is a state. Europeans fall in love. But that is not love. It is one's intrinsic nature.

Rangra Do you mean that it is spontaneous and not a conscious act ?

Raja Rao Yes, it is not a conscious activity. It is one's real nature.

Rangra In the Sahitya Akademi meeting the other day, quoting Bhartrihari, you said, "If a writer is not seeking *moksha* through his writings, he is not a writer." When asked to define *moksha*, you said, "*Moksha* is to establish oneself beyond body and beyond mind." That way, I think, every writer attempts through his writings to establish himself beyond his body and beyond his mind. He establishes himself in the word. Even when his body and mind cease to exist when he is dead, he exists in the word, Is that what you mean ?

Raja Rao No. I am not talking of that level.

Rangra Will you elaborate on this ?

Raja Rao By beyond the body and beyond the mind, I mean, being completely impersonal, beyond one's personality i.e. beyond *Mana, Buddhi* and *Ahankāra*, that is the point.

Rangra Do you mean beyond ego?

Raja Rao Yes, mind is ego.

Rangra When we say *sādhāranīkaran,* we mean beyond ego, from the reader's point of view.

Raja Rao I don't care a damn for the readers when I write. I try to say something for myself and if that is interesting to me, it would be interesting to the public. I don't think of the public as such. May be that is why I write difficult books. My new book also is very difficult.

Rangra Is that your new novel *The Chess-Master and His Moves*, which you say is expected to be published in a few month's time.*

Raja Rao Yes. However, let me add, I am not interested in the usual things—the author, the publisher, the royalty, the review etc—I am not interested in them.

Rangra But surely you must be interested in the communication.

Raja Rao Communication for me is that which gets communicated to me. That's all.

Rangra There is a reader within the author also.

Raja Rao That reader is myself, but not outside me.

Rangra Unless the reader in you is satisfied, you will not be satisfied.

Raja Rao I don't think the reader can ever be satisfied.

Rangra That way, even no author is ever satisfied completely and it is that feeling of inadequacy that what he

* The novel has since been published.—*Ed.*

wanted to say, he has not been able to say, prods him to write again and again.

Raja Rao Not again and again. It prods him to correct himself, what he says constantly.

Rangra Yes, to perfect himself.

Raja Rāo As far as possible.

Rangra You have minutely depicted woman's psychology through Madeleine of *The Serpent and the Rope* and Irene of *Comrade Kirillov*. Some people say that male writers are not able to do justice to their female characters as they depict them from the male point of view. Do you think there is any substance in this contention?

Raja Rao In the creative process when one goes beyond one's body and beyond one's mind, one is neither male, nor female.

Rangra Do you mean that at this level of writing, one rises above sex and caste?

Raja Rao Yes, beyond all limitations, if one can reach that level. I only try to reach such an inner situation.

Rangra There is another thing we hear these days. It is about author's commitment. It is often said that every author must be a committed writer. Do you also subscribe to this view? If so, whom do you think the writer should be committed to?

Raja Rao I cannot say about others. But I am committed to *Advaita Vedānta*. I am a *sādhaka*.

Rangra Are you committed to *Advaita Vedānta* at the conscious level or because you think that is your real nature. Can you reason it out?

Raja Rao Oh! Yes, I can reason it out. When you understand that beyond your body and beyond your mind is the Absolute Reality, then you are a *vedāntin*.

Rangra In your novel, *The Serpent and the Rope*, you have given an ancient story about Krishna, Radha and Durvasa to explain this point.

Raja Rao Yes.

Rangra Radha becomes highly possessive of Krishna. Krishna wants to enlighten her and looks for an opportunity. In the meantime, as the story goes, Durvasa Rishi comes and pitches himself across the river Yamuna. Krishna asks Radha to cook some food and take it over to the Rishi. Radha asks Krishna how to cross the swollen river. He asks her to tell the river that Krishna, the *Brahmachāri*, has asked the river to give way to Radha. Radha thinks, "Krishna is telling a lie. How could he be a *Brahmachari?* I know him more than anybody else." Anyhow, the river gives way on hearing Krishna's command. She feeds the Rishi and when she is leaving, the Rishi asks her to tell the river that Durvasa, the *Upavasi*, wants the river to give way to Radha. Radha thinks, "The Rishi is also telling a lie. How could he be an *Upavasi* when he has fed himself with such utter satisfaction?" The river, however, gives way to her on hearing the Rishi's command. Radha is completely baffled by this new reality. And on returning home, she questions Krishna. He asks her who is the Krishna she loves? Is that his body or his mind? And tells her that if she does not love Krishna beyond his body and beyond his mind, then it is just an illusion.

Raja Rao It is not illusion. It is a misunderstanding.

Rangra In the novel you have used the word "illusion".

Raja Rao Yes, I wrote it many years back. But now I would like to say "misunderstanding".

Rangra Misunderstanding of what?

Raja Rao Misunderstanding of the truth, i.e., *Advaita*.

Rangra Some people say that development can take place only out of duality and not at the *Advaita* stage; when God, the Creator, was bored with loneliness, he created the universe, *Eko Aham Bahu Syām*.

Raja Rao But that is the game, *Lila*. When you are only one, there is no problem. You can enjoy yourself in your loneliness, in that blissful state.

Rangra Did you at any time write poetry?

Raja Rao No, never.

Rangra But with your mind, poetry could be nearer to you.

Raja Rao People tell me that my prose is poetic.

Rangra Yes, that is correct—otherwise also I feel that no prose is hundred per cent prose and no poetry is all poetry. A good fiction usually has a poetic element in it. Now, we come to literary awards. How do you view them as a writer? Do you think, they encourage genuine writing ?

Raja Rao Awards are irrelevant to the level of my writing. When the Sahitya Akademi Award was announced for my novel, *The Serpent and the Rope*, I wondered whether those who made the choice followed even one-tenth of what I wanted to say in my novel. I thought of refusing it straightaway. But my sister made a point against such a move. She asked me whether I was getting too proud of myself to accept the Award. I thought, may be she was right. So I consented to receive it and attended the function as a ritual. I had asked my friends not to attend the function.

Rangra Would you like to say something about your forthcoming novel, *The Chess-Master and His Moves*?

Raja Rao No. I would not like to pre-condition you. You just wait and see.

Rangra Has it something to do with your concept of love in continuation of the thinking that has gone into your earlier works.

Raja Rao It would be even better, I hope. But wait and see.

Rangra What are you writing these days or you contemplate to write?

Raja Rao I am correcting my earlier writings.

Rangra Is that for their new editions?

Raja Rao These are not the published works. I am working on some of my unpublished writings.

Rangra I enquire this because experience has shown that some writers in their attempt to improve upon their earlier writings in the subsequent editions have rather spoiled them.

Raja Rao That is possible.

Rangra Can you please name any of your characters or works which brought about a change in your outlook towards life. I venture to ask this, because I feel that it is not always the writer who creates his characters or works, they also create him without his being aware of it.

Raja Rao I don't think so. Although it is very personal. I would say, I create change in me by my *sādhana*. So I don't think that my book changes me. I understand the question, but it does not apply to me.

Rangra *Sādhana* is not done at the conscious level, I believe.

Raja Rao You begin with it at the conscious level.

Rangra We understand that it is a continuing process involving many rebirths and one picks up thread from the earlier life and grows on. We are told that it is not a conscious effort on the part of the *sādhak* that brings about a change in him.

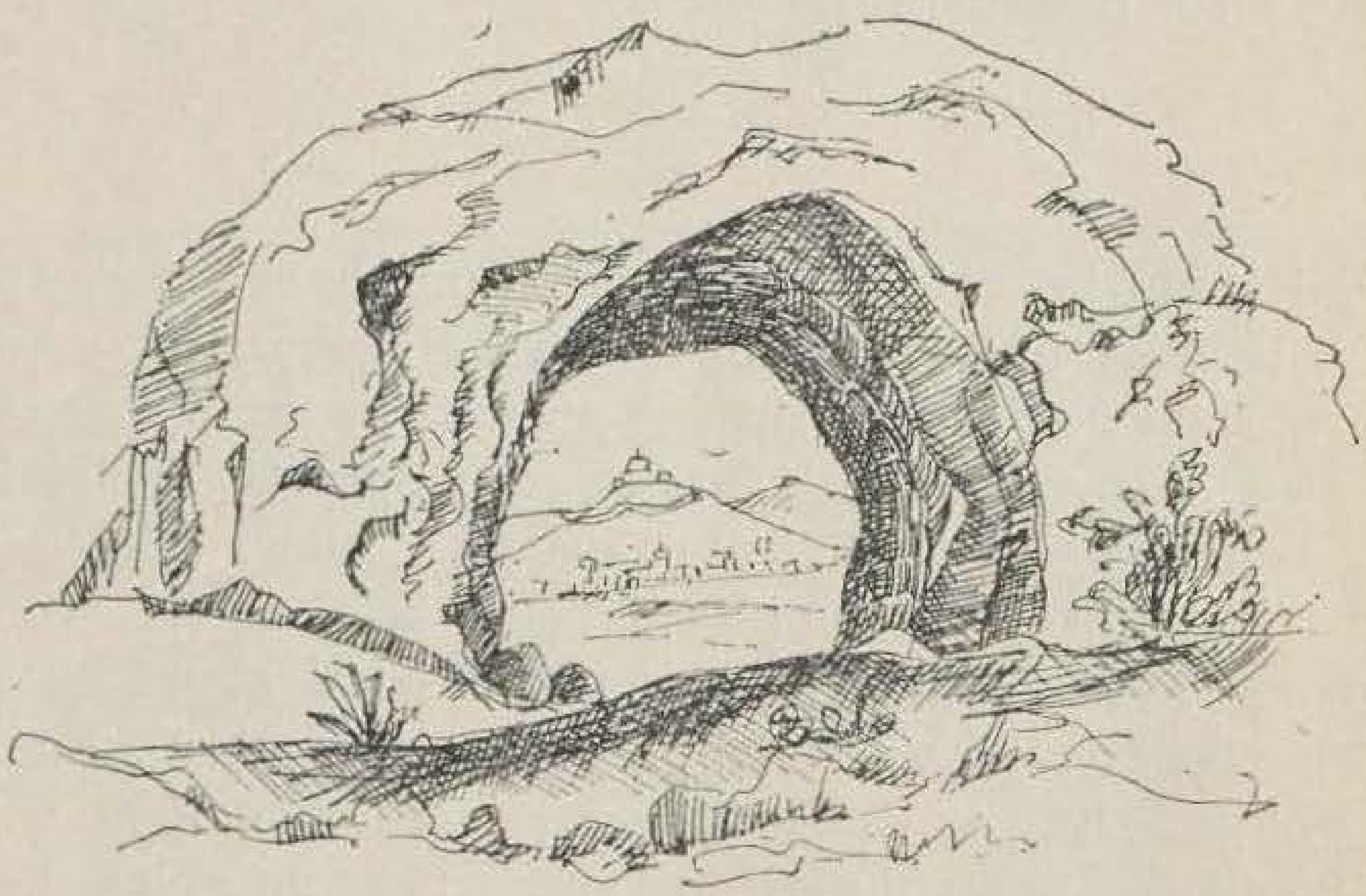
Raja Rao Yes, I am not consciously aware of the change taking place in me at the deeper level. All what I want to say is that it is the *sadhana* that changes me and not the book.

Rangra By *sadhana*, do you mean all that you experience in life?

Raja Rao No, it is something special, say meditation, if you like.

Rangra Has any of your short stories or novels been translated into Kannada or any other Indian language?

Raja Rao A collection of my short stories, *Raja Rao ki Kahanian*, has just been published in Hindi. People have tried to translate me in Kannada also, but they say, it is not possible because of my peculiar style. Some people have tried, but not succeeded.



Ilango Adigal and Dante Alighieri

Silappadhikaram and the *Divine Comedy* a comparison and a contrast in literary method

KA NAA SUBRAMANYAM

THE contrasts between the epic of the Italian poet Dante Alighieri and the epic of the Tamil poet Ilango Adigal are obvious. The poets belong by training and temperament to two vastly differing cultures, two opposed civilisations, and belong to two different continents. Dante is heir to the Christian heritage, writing his epic after St. Thomas Aquinas, deriving directly from him his metaphysical, moral concerns. But he was no ascetic and was human enough to consign all his political rivals to Hell and Purgatory and finding his friends in Paradiso. Ilango Adigal was an ascetic, with no enemies to speak of; he was knowledgeable in music and dance and makes his epic the vehicle for displaying his knowledge, almost with human vanity.

Dante's *Divine Comedy* describes the voyage of a living person guided through the first two circles by a poet of ancient Rome, Virgil, and through the third circle, that of Heaven, by a Platonic beloved, Beatrice, to whom he proclaimed love through eternity. *Silappadhikaram* too speaks of the ascent to Godhead

of a human being, this time of a woman following the strait and narrow path of chastity; she wins Heaven with her husband and becomes a Godhead on earth Dante describes a journey into Paradise and a return; Ilango describes a journey wholly heavenward. How a mortal reaches Godhead is the burden of song in Ilango; it is almost the same in Dante but through Hell and Purgatory and it is a Christian Godhead which allows no other Godhead, unlike the Hindu or Jain pantheon which admitted of many Gods and Goddesses.

Both Dante and Ilango have a historical axe to grind. Dante's history is entwined with the political troubles of Florence and the myths of Europe and from the first two books, we can get a whole history of Europe and Florence, the Ghibelline and the other party fighting through generations of men. Dante was an exile. So might Ilango be said to be an exile. His parentage was royal but he was self-exiled from the kingdom by his own choice having become a Jaina mendicant abdicating his chances of the throne on being told by an astrologer that he might become king. And Ilango's history was the history of the Tamil Empires and their hereditary fight with the northern kings. The sense of history which is not confined to the third of the *Silappadhikaram* is more obvious in Ilango than in Dante who comes to his historical pronouncements through individuals and not states and at best by families, distinguished as well as plebeian.

One other point of parallelism can be noted: both the epic poets were not writing the traditional epic for which the standards had been set in Europe by Homer and Virgil and in India by Valmiki, Asvaghosha and Kalidasa. They were nevertheless writing or composing what were to be considered epics but they were courageous enough to be consciously different.

The European idea of the epic was dictated by Homer. Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* together laid down the ground rules for epic writing, and were practised by epic writers. The epic need have no moral stances as far as Homer was concerned, but it had to have a hero, a noble soul, whose heroic adventures

edify and entertain. A recent reader of Homer, Robert Graves, was at pains to say something about Homer which no one before him had said—that Homer deliberately set out to belittle the divine actions of the Greek Gods. He offered a new translation of Homer's *Iliad*, entitled *The Anger of Achilles*. Homer was writing at the fag-end of the Greek Gods' reign and he could show up the smallnesses, their petty jealousies and the pettier-mindedness of the ancient Gods whose reign was drawing to an end. About *Odyssey*, he has no such comments. Or if he had, I have not come across them.

In the case of later epics, they were judged mostly by Homeric standards. Homer set the tune for epics. Virgil writing a Latin epic was nationalistically inspired by the Roman Empire and set out "to surpass Homer" in his own way; it is obvious that he has not surpassed Homer but the real Homer was not known to the Dante age—he had it only in reconstructions from the Arabic but he had Virgil intact before him. Dante departed from Virgil and the versions of Homer available to him in ways that are apparent. The moral stance is something wholly Christian but necessary in keeping the epic together as a whole, an insightful vision. And the hero's journey is mythical, metaphysical, and in a world that exists only in the poet's imagination, supplemented by the imagination of all the Christians of his time, there being other heresies in Christendom but no schisms like Protestantism and other denominations that were to come later. The moral lesson of the epic, of the punishment that God could mete out to sinners and the unrepentant, and of the gifts of the grace of God with which he could give a glimpse of his paradise to the virtuous, is obvious. Homer's heroes are full of courage, adventure—heroism or cleverness like Odysseus—but hardly have any spiritual side or depth to them. In this Dante differed from the epic-makers before his time; his sense of history is not the history of his hero.

Ilango too dared to be different from the tradition he had inherited. It might have come about by virtue of his having not belonged to the Vaidik Sanskrit order in which the

Ramayana was looked up to as the first among the Poems of India. He was a Jain and he naturally ignored the Vedic tradition. He had his own version of the *Ramayana* as a Jain; he might be expected to have been familiar with it, but he did not show any awareness of it, as far as his poem itself was concerned. His was the Jain world but the Jains were losing ground at the time he was writing. Dante's world is a completely Christian world with all its deficiencies and gains. Ilango's was not a completely Jain world, there were other elements, religious, cultural and metaphysical in it. And in incorporating them in his epic, the Jain poet gains more than Dante did by his background.

The Jain religion had its own moral stances and these were to a great extent as valid and as significant as the Christian world and morals to Dante. Which is better is only a matter of choice and tradition. The Jain moral stances could be simply explained, as the poet Ilango explains towards the end of his epic in the following words:

> I speak to you. Through the excuse of speaking to you, I speak to all the people. A tale told should be tale of wisdom leading to the good life. Men and women of the world, you should raise your thoughts above worldly pain and pleasure, sorrow and joy. Here, I repeat after the sages of old, the rules for a good life. Seek God always and serve only those who serve God. Cherish those who are near to God. Do not lie. Do not slander others. Do not eat flesh. Do not cause pain to any living thing. Give much in charity and fast on appointed days. Do not ever forget the good done to you by others. Do not ever be found in evil company. Never give false evidence. Never avoid the truth. Always seek those who fear God. Shun the Godless. Do not hanker after other people's wives or property. Attend always to those who are ill or weak. Observe all the domestic virtues. Do not cultivate bad habits, shun drink, thieving, sensuousness, bad company and untruth. The young will grow old, the rich will become poor, the human body is only a temporary dwelling for the immortal soul of man. The days of even the most careful among men are numbered. There can be no escape from Fate for any one. Search for the things that will lead you to the real goal of life.

Ilango, however, was not a didactic poet; he draws the morals all together in the last lines of his long poem. The moral is such that Dante might have agreed, only he might baulk at the specifically Jain portion of not eating meat and not drinking. Dante loved Beatrice platonically as it was called, having seen her only twice before her death and remained in the spirit and soul faithful, though she was married early and had a son and Dante himself married and had children by his wife. His love was an arc of the divine love which he was sure was his and eternal. This aspect of love is more physical in the Tamil epic but in describing both Madhavi the dancer and Kannagi the wife as both equally in love with Kovalan, Ilango was making concessions to the Indian habit of polygamy. But the love is, however, eternal, though divisible evidently.

In quite a few other things too Ilango was not following the Indian tradition set for the *Itihasa* or epic, if we can identify the terms as signifying the same thing. *Itihasa* means thus it happened. *Silappadhikaram* also claims to tell a story that happened in the Indian Tamil tradition. But it is something which happened to a woman and the woman is the recognisable "hero", not the man who is just a victim. This was one of the greater departures from the tradition, one which brings Ilango nearer to us in time.

Epics in the Sanskrit tradition are said to describe only one city, the city of the hero; Ilango describes three cities, Puhaar in extenso, Madurai as far as Kovalan and Kannagi perceive it, and Vanchi as far as was needed for the poem.

Dante's epic is also city-centred. Florence is present whether it is Hell or Purgatory or Paradise which Dante is traversing and some of the Florentine families are delineated in detail, noble as well as plebeian. In Ilango the cities emerge as naturally out of the narration as the poet could make them emerge. Which is delineated with greater love is a question which many of us might answer in different ways. Puhaar seems to have come in for more detailed examination and description because

in the other two cities the narration makes for a quickening of pace. The ascetic introducing both the cities of Madurai and Puhaar, first glances at the streets of the prostitutes, then at the centres of commerce. Though Dante is also of the city, he does not physically describe the city. But he adds concreteness to such details of the families of Florence that he speaks about. The epics of Dante and Ilango have moved far from the unsophisticated primitive versions of the epic that Homer or Ovid or Virgil attempted or in the other case Valmiki or Asvaghosha or Kalidasa attempted.

And the last point of comparison might be the mastery of verse and the selectivity of details that each poet was showing in his narration. Ilango was writing after half a millennium of the origins of Tamil poetry, if we accept his date as the date fixed by the meticulous Vyapuri Pillai as the first quarter of the tenth century. But usually the traditional scholar in Tamil places it in the second century. If we accept that date, we should accept that Ilango was writing at the beginning of a tradition, just like Dante who chose the "vulgar tongue" Italian to write his epic in instead of the noble Latin that was in use for all literary effort. Both poets display an adequacy that makes us marvel about their command over the medium. The terza rima in Italian reads like a long unravelled sentence covering some 14233 verses. In the *Silappadhikaram*, the blank verse runs through canto after canto, with interruptions of musical passages, but unbroken in its larger rhythm.

Both the epics show a marvellous structuring that should have been the despair of lesser poets. It is in the structuring that Dante is most comparable to Ilango. Each line distinctly occupies the place it is made to occupy in the whole poem. There might be digressions by way of musical or dance information but it is designed and fitted into the whole.

Dante's epic has been compared to a honeycomb. *Silappadikaram* is not so elaborate, but is nevertheless a spider's web where the poet is the spider holding all the strings in his mind or hand. It is extremely taut and tightened consciously as no

other poet has done in Tamil or in Italian, before or since. Dante and Ilango are unique in writing epics that do not fit into the tradition, but are uniquely personal documents that hold our attention today both by what they have to say and by the universes of moral significance they portray. Both moral universes might have gone out of date and use but the poetry remains far beyond the bounds of tradition or literary history, each valid in its way.

They are self-conscious about the poetry as can be evidenced by internal evidence; they were more conscious of the moral significance of the world and gave expression to it in no uncertain manner. Tamil and Italian achieved a precision in their use, that is early in time and miraculous even today. The one is strictly Tamil, Jain; the other is equally uniquely Italian, Christian. This is what makes their poems comparable, meaningful, and similar in spite of the great differences of culture and emphasis, understanding and insight.



Major Bibliographies of Indian Literature

K.M. GOVI
PUSHPAVENI GOVI

WHEN the Sahitya Akademi initiated action in the early fifties to compile the now well-known *National Bibliography of Indian Literature*, only Marathi had a comprehensive retrospective bibliography. But recent decades have witnessed massive efforts in some of the modern Indian languages to compile and publish retrospective bibliographies, after surveying and identifying the literary output of the past two centuries. These efforts as well as a few significant bibliographies on Indian literature and genres are, however, unknown outside the linguistic region. Nor have they received the recognition they deserve. An endeavour is being made here to introduce the major bibliographies in Indian languages. It is of course not the intention of this essay to critically examine them, for no single Indian can attempt such a task. We shall only describe the scope, coverage, structure and the salient features of the publications.

Marathi

Let us begin with Marathi, which has the distinction of having published the first comprehensive retrospective biblio-

graphy in an Indian language. It was the single handed devotion of an individual, Sankar Ganesh Date (1905-64) that led to the publication of *Marathi Granthasuchi*; as far back as in 1943. Date recorded 18,768 titles printed in Marathi between 1800 and 1937 in a classified bibliography whose subject-divisions are based on the well-known Dewey Decimal classification. Of course the bibliographer made his own modifications in the scheme of subjects to suit the language he surveyed. Extending the coverage to 1950, he published a a supplementary volume in 1961 to list 7839 titles. Both the volumes contain full details of the items listed and have author-title-indices. Date's authenticity has not been questioned and the scholars are in his debt.

Hindi

Hindi is fairly affluent in the sphere of bibliographies. A compilation titled *Hindi Granthasuchi Sarini* lists over one hundred fifty catalogues, exhibition lists and bibliographies in the language. We shall deal only with four major retrospective bibliographies. Krishnacharya (1917-77) made an able survey of early printed books in his *Hindi ke Adi Mudrit Granth*. Dividing the first seven decades of the nineteenth century, which witnessed the growth and spread of the art of printing in Indian languages, into three distinct phases which he calls *Lallu Yug* (1801-21), *Missionary Yug* (1822-44) and *Sivaprasad Sitare Hind Yug* (1845-70), Krishnacharya lists the early Hindi imprints chronologically. Apart from the learned introduction which briefly chronicles the history of the printing press in India and in Hindi, the book contains a very useful section on early Hindi grammars and dictionaries printed in English and other foreign languages.

The Nagari Pracharini Sabha of Varanasi published a select classified list in 1957 under the title *Hindi mein Ucchatar Sahitya*. It lists over 20,000 titles but does not attempt a physical description of the items listed. *Brihat Hindi Granthasuchi* (1965)

compiled by Yaspal and Krishna Mahajan is another useful guide to Hindi publications. An alphabetical catalogue consisting of an author-section and a title-section, it records over 24,000 books published up to 1964. Mahajans issued a supplement in 1966 to cover the output in 1965 and 1966.

The most ambitious project aimed at a near total bibliographical coverage of books in Hindi was undertaken by the Visvesvarananda Institute of Hoshiarpur. The two-volume *Hindi Sahitya Sarini*, published under the imprint of the Institute is more comprehensive than any of the previous volumes, as it records nearly 40,00 books published in the language from the earliest times to 1964, the year of its planning. The *Sarini* lists the books under twenty subject-groups and devotes the first volume to literary works. The second volume deals with books in other fields and contains the Index. The bibliography would have been more useful, if it had attempted a full lphysica description of the books it records.

Punjabi

Of the Indo-Aryan languages the only other language which can claim a fairly comprehensive record of the printed wealth is Punjabi, which, it may be remembered, is one of the languages affected by the partition of the country. The survey of the Punjabi book world was undertaken by the Language Department at Patiala. Covering the period from the earliest times to 1968, the Punjabi Bibliography presents the essential details of over 12,000 titles in a tabular form, discarding in the process, the usual indentions and typographical distinctions the bibliographers are fond of. The Bibliography is in two volumes: the classified subject-wise catalogue known as *Punjabi Pustak Kosh*, and the alphabetical section under the title *Punjabi Prakashan di Suchi*. Both the volumes contain full bibliographical details. But the bibliography breaks the basic rule of cataloguing a book under its author. The translations in the language are listed under the names of the translators and to locate a

Tagore or a Thakazhi, you have to make a search for the translator.

Tamil

Of the four southern languages, only Telugu lacks a comprehensive bibliography. Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam have witnessed massive efforts of retrospective survey and listing. While planning the retrospective bibliograpy of Tamil books the then Government of Madras chose to use the fairly well preserved and enormous collection of books deposited with the Registrar of Books under the Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867. The much maligned Registration Act which imposed a statutory obligation on the printers in British India to deposit books and other printed material with a designated official of the District Administration was the first attempt by the British Government to tackle the problem of bibliographical cover of "Vernacular" literature. Although the motive behind the legislation was more political than academic, it led to the crystallization of certain collections in the Presidencies. The collection now preserved in the Tamil Nadu Archives, in Madras, was used to compile the mammoth *Tamil Nool Vivara Attavanai.* The aim of the bibliography is to record the Tamil literary output between 1867 and 1950, in a number of volumes, each volume being devoted to a certain period. The volumes have been split into a number of parts, each part being devoted to a group of subjects. Patterned on the model of *Indian National Bibliography* the *Attavanai* is a good classified catalogue providing full details of the books preserved in the Archives. Although it is a significant contribution to Tamil studies, the decision to use only the Archive collection has *ipso facto* reduced the coverage of the bibliography. An access to the early printed books of the first six decades of the nineteenth century has thus been denied to scholars. It may be remembered here that Tamil was the first among the Indian languages to exploit the movable type and that the language

accumulated a considerable quantity of printed wealth. And it is also quite likely that not all the titles printed since 1867 reached the Registrar of Books. Be that as it may, the publishing programme is in progress and has reached the thirties of the present century.

Kannada

It was the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the University of Mysore in 1966 that paved the way for the mapping of the Kannada-book-world. The University, as part of the Jubilee, set up a research unit to survey the literary output. The work begun in 1967 by a team of researchers resulted in the collection of data of over 30,000 titles printed between 1817 and 1967. The first volume of the *Kannada Granthasuchi* containing entries of 1449 titles in the realm of pure science was released in 1971. Since then six more volumes, of which the third, fourth and fifth are devoted to literary works, have been published. The scope of the project was later extended to cover current output and the period between 1969 and 1980 has been covered in four volumes. The bibliographical description is complete and the printing excellent. The volumes have made an attempt to specify the location of the titles by naming the collections where they were available at the time of compilation. Whether these books are now available for use is another question.

Malayalam

Malayalam, like Tamil, has a hoary tradition of printing. But as most other Indian languages, Malayalam was also leaning on the memory of a few scholars to solve the problems of authorship and editions till the seventies. In 1970, the Kerala Sahitya Akademi, which has a strong publication programme, asked one of the writers of this essay to plan, compile

and edit a retrospective bibliography. Constraints of finance prevented the Akademi from following the Karnataka model which set up a full time research unit for the task. Instead, a time-bound programme of simultaneous listing inside and outside the State was drawn up. An appeal in the media for old books also turned out to be fruitful. The data thus collected was finally collated and edited to produce a two-volume classified bibliography under the title *Malayala Granthasuchi*. The *Granthasuchi* contains full bibliographical details of over 26,000 titles published between 1772, when the first book *Samkshepa Vedartham*, a compendium on Bible was printed in Rome, and 1970 when the compilation was decided on. The first volume (1973) deals with 15,623 literary works including translations from other languages and the second volume (1974) contains the details of functional and other literature under thirty broad classes, as also the author, title, series, subject indices common to the two volumes. A long introduction traces the history of printing and publishing in Malayalam and surveys the bibliographical work in Indian languages. A statistical analysis of books, decade and subject-wise, with a number of graphs, and a large number of reproductions of early title pages, are other salient features of this bibliography.

Committed to continue the project, the Akademi brought out a third volume to cover the output between 1971 and 1975. But further volumes have not surfaced so far, although the material has been collected. It may also be mentioned here that the bibliography project led to the strengthening and reorganisation of the Akademi Library which, with over 40,000 titles and files of old periodicals, is the best Malayalam collection today. And we have Prof. Sukumar Azhikode, an eminent teacher and critic who has now retired from the University of Calicut, on record that it is this collection, that persuaded him to buy a house in Trichur, the seat of the Akademi.

From this survey, it is evident that only half a dozen of the

Indian languages have comprehensive guides to their printed wealth. Of course the State Library, Calcutta, has, in 1980, published a bibliography of Bengali books which the Library calls *Krayalabhya Bangla Granther Talika* which means a catalogue of Bengali books in print. But a "books in print", which lists only a couple of current editions of Bankimchandra is no substitute for a systematic bibliography, the need for which is very much there as interest in the language is not confined to West Bengal. The rest of the Indian languages still depend on library catalogues, most of which are just check lists, and trade-lists. And there are languages (such as Oriya) which do not even have good trade catalogues. Of course there is a classified bibliography on Orissa, prepared by a foreign scholar, Hermann Kulke, in Roman script. Kulke's compilation has a chapter on language and literature. And it is very selective.

Indian National Bibliography

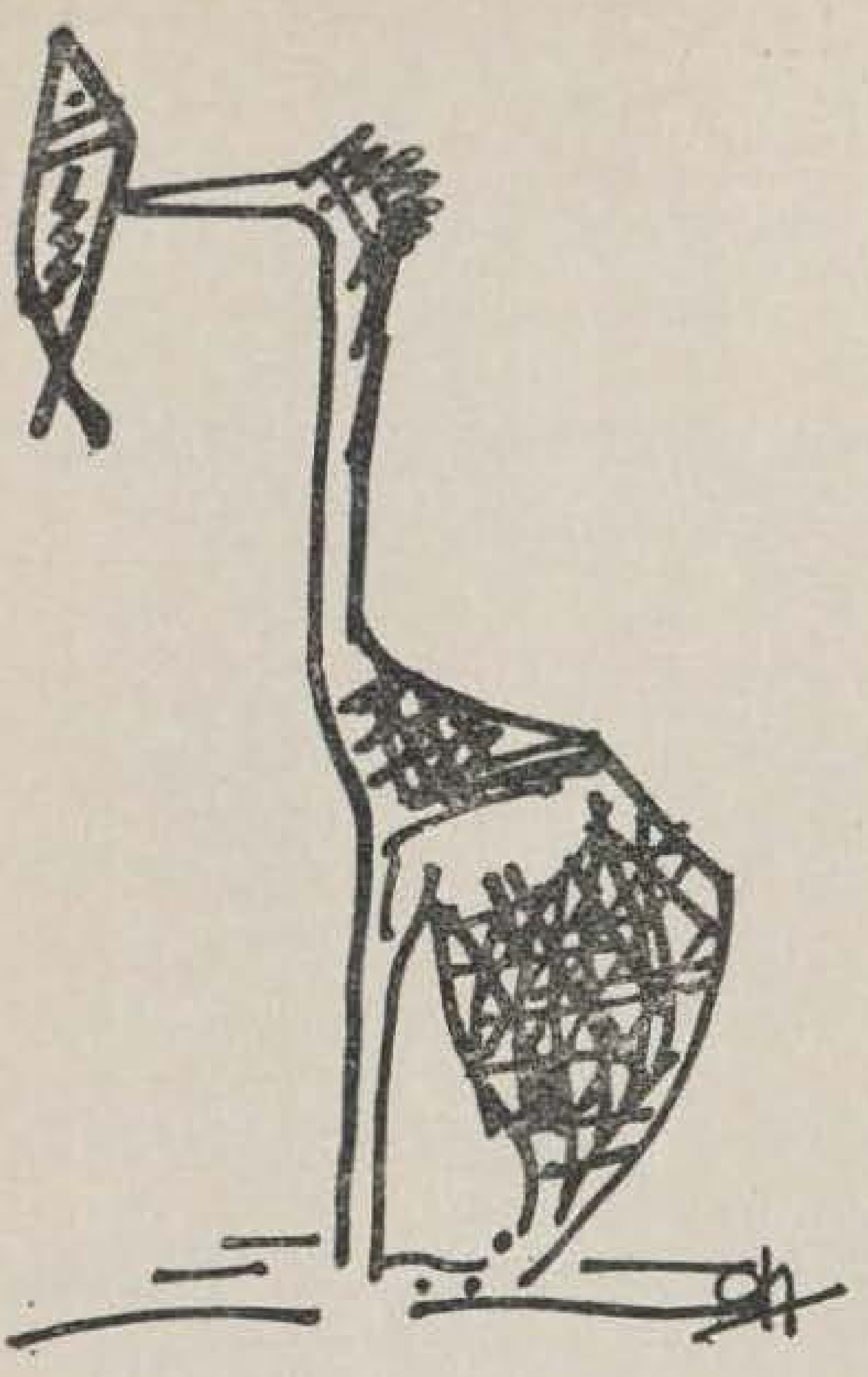
A certain bibliographical control of current printed wealth—books printed since 1954—would have been achieved had the scheme of publishing a string of annual bibliographies in modern Indian languages as part of the *Indian National Bibliography* project been implemented with vigour and expedition. But the project has fallen face down and only Malayalam can claim a continuous and regular publication programme with annual issues and a couple of decennial cumulation. It is rather unfortunate that those who read and write in Indian languages do not get the due benefits from quarter century old national bibliography whose avowed objective, at the time of launching, was encouragement of Indian books and literature. It is time to take a close look at the project which deserves a decentralised re-structuring

Thus there exists a wide gap in the field of Indian bibliography, and the gap may get wider as years roll by and more

and more books, old and current, disappear from private homes and public shelves.

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Book Reviews

Stylistic Virtuosity

Fowl-Filcher
by Ranga Rao
(Penguin Books, 1987, pp. 187, Rs. 55)

EXTRACT

"FF was even fascinated by the variety of trucks he saw on the road: manure trucks; cement trucks; trucks carrying gravel—the coolies just lay asleep on the bare bed of the gravel in the truck without even a sheet of cloth beneath them and how they managed to sleep was God's wonder; and, just before the winter began, in early October, trucks carrying well-dried logs for fuel, bound for the north where, Ramulu told FF, the winter was so cold you could get an electric shock each time you put your hand in water; covered trucks with steel furniture, refrigerators, radios in cardboard cartons, cartons and cartons of cigarettes, paddy, sugarcane and saplings from a nursery; chaff trucks in huge *tarpaul*; heavy coal trucks that groaned with the weight; tankers, of petrol or diesel; kerosene trucks with greased lids on their tankers, at times dripping oil dangerously; and strawloaded trucks moving down like unkempt devils just roused from sleep.

"Soon FF developed an assessing eye for trucks: each truck had its own physiognomy, a revealing look about it, its face carried its own character. They were like water buffaloes: in a herd they looked alike, but each had its own temperament, personality, character. There was the truck which was battered, dented, its sides carrying marks of violent scratching, indentations, its mudguard awry like the moustaches of someone just emerging from a fight. Then there was the potbellied truck, suffering from indigestion, and other internal troubles, belching thick black smoke, which Ramulu

> steadily avoided. Or the shabby truck with its wheels so wobbly that it was a wonder that it could speed and a wonder that it did not break down at that speed. A wonder because, Ramulu pointed out at times, the countryside was strewn with the carcasses of careless trucks; or unlucky ones."

A word about the author first: after a few impressionable years in the Telegraph Department, V. Panduranga Rao resumed his studies, took his M.A. in English literature with a first class first, and secured his Ph. D. with a competent dissertation on the novels of R.K. Narayan. This was over two decades ago. He has since been teaching English with dedication and increasing expertise in a college in Delhi.

As a creative writer, Panduranga Rao began with short stories that selectively drew upon the deposits of memory going back to his Telegraph Department connection and earlier, and he also revealed a stylistic resilience adapted to the themes and moods of his tales. The unitive design, the play of change in little space and the sting in the tail together charged the stories with trembling life. Some of the stories appeared in the *Illustrated Weekly* and attracted immediate attention.

It was inevitable Panduranga Rao should presently try his hand at a novel. *Fowl-Filcher* is the result. Wisely resisting the temptation merely to "imitate" R.K. Narayan or any of the other exemplars of Indo-Anglian fiction, Panduranga Rao has boldly and painstakingly built on his own commendable experiments with shorter fiction. But the novelist now sports a handy new name. Even as R.K. Narayanaswami underwent abridgement into R.K. Narayan, V. Panduranga Rao too now makes his bow as the three syllabic Ranga Rao. Could be almost mistaken for Raja Rao, although their worlds are far apart.

The fact Ranga Rao has graduated from the short story to the short novel shows itself in the episodic organisation of *Fowl-Filcher*. And more to the point, *Fowl-Filcher* is in the old and tested picaresque tradition, covering a curtal life-span of about forty years from birth to death. Like

the snake, Fowl-Filcher, as he progresses, casts off the worn out scales. Also, like the proverbial cat, he has his several lives too after a fashion. Shikari's son, dogcatcher, hunting guide, married serf, truck-driver's assistant, adroit drug-runner, politician's factotum, riot engineer-cum-victim: a full circle!

And even as FF's life careers through a variety of roles, the scene of action shifts exasperatingly-hamlet, hillside, countryside, roadside, small town, city. And, historically, the narrative comprises both the 'Raj' of colonial days and the birth-pangs of 'Swaraj' marked by division, violence and worse than brutality. Simple holocaust, in fact.

Essentially conceived as exercises in near-caricature, Fowl-Filcher the protagonist and *Fowl-Filcher* the fictional recital both subsist on comic exaggeration and liberal doses of whimsy and fancy throughout, and yet seldom stray beyond the limits of the possible and even the probable. The laughter, again, is not seldom perilously close to the tears in things. And much of the success of the portraiture and evocation of scene and incident derives from Ranga Rao's stylistic virtuosity and adequacy.

The episode of FF's entanglement in the nymphomaniac's inexhaustible appetite is, perhaps, more cerebral than actual, for with a character like FF, the borderland between fact and fancy can be very tenuous indeed. But here, as elsewhere in the novel, a residual ring of authenticity makes up for the surface fantasy and exuberance.

As a tale of modern India, indited after the manner of a Sterne rather than Fielding, a Gunter Grass of *The Tin Drum* and not of Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*, something of the truth no doubt comes through the oddity, falsity, and fantasy, but this is by no means the whole truth or even the quintessential truth. It would be sad if the interested "foreign" reader carried away the impression that *Fowl-Filcher* were much more than a minuscule part of India, peripheral rather than central.

For a first novel, *Fowl-Filcher* is no mean achievement, for its sweep of intention is nearly matched by the power of its execution. And I would end with the prayer: *A requiem for old FF.*

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar



Disciplined Exuberance

The Third Passenger
by Subhash Chandra Narula
Foreword by M.C. Bradbrook
(published by the author; pp. 76, Rs. 50.)

HIVE AND THE QUEEN

The root had firmly held depleting hive
Through the snow, the blue heaven begins to show
Beyond the clouds that almost choked all life
And now begin to rise allowing breath and glow;
The hive, rail-junction-platform hums and bustles;
The imperious whorl draws in Prince Arjun
And casts him out at will, his benediction
Despite, the while his unwilling wing rustles
'Gainst many another; Queen-bee eagles
Above, beyond whorl, gaze confirming love;
He must abandon strife—the netted dove—
Stand wrapt, unwrought by whorl that inveigles—
Queen waits to gather him in wings of light—
Spread out benediction wings and take flight.

One wishes there were some trick to undo the effect of the way this volume of poems has been published, that is, by the author himself. I say this, for the poems are good enough to be a little more widely read. But, may be, they are being read; however, normally privately published volumes stay put with their authors. At any rate I have benefited by reading the work. I only wish the author keeps writing, and does not give up for lack of response, or the vagaries of the publishing industry.

In general, Narula's are sensitive impressions of his life circumstance. His is an absorption in the violence and change

that mark ordinary life—always with a certain suggestion, explicit or not, of their significance as keys to the aesthetic or spiritual process.

But what are the special merits of his verse?—First, that it is disciplined in its manners and attitudes. There is little sign of a wild poetic license in it, and no special pleadings. On the contrary, the author observes protocol fully. He uses language with respect, till it becomes his willing partner. One says this, since the writing of verse is getting to be something of a joke, each for him or herself, the emphasis invariably being on expression—self expression: control missing, and the movement of language sloppy or slack Narula is quite otherwise, sufficiently distanced from himself to mix the rites of art with those of life. His verse does therefore metamorphose into being poems. This is due to distancing as much as to other poetic strategies: he employs the full resources of language—sound, as also meaning. The sound values? Those of structuring or symmetry (or order); such, that the echoes and reverberations are felt in the ear as a pattern—a handsome architecture of phrases—the rhythms and rhymes; exact and precise. You can't improve the verses on these sundry counts. There is delight in this:

> Not here bound by walls of brick and mortar
> She's resident, nor in the mortal frame,
> So shapely modelled from clay and water
> Sustaining warmth flowing in sanguine stream, . . .
>
> (Temple Walls)

or

> His withdrawal M'lord spelt his doom:
> He was his own best company,
> There's no end to their presumption,
> What the creation needs is a swineherd—
>
> (The Witness)

Narula's verse is energetic as well as subtle, I mean the argument of it. And to have the whole book hinge on one king-

pin image, namely the Mahabharata character Arjun is indicative of the fact that he can sustain poetic meditation over a vast enough stretch; it might fatigue many a would-be poet.

Then again, despite what I call discipline, Narula has an exuberance which seems to enter his writing physically and shapes the poems through a kind of muscular pressure. The ten-line poem "Resentment", for instance, renders in a few rollicking, dizzy sentences the heavy-cum-light singing of the linnet. It is as close to literal experience as a poem can well be. The quieter, "The Bubble", is a picture at once charming and sentimental of what may be termed a languorous movement. It is musically rich, even though the images in it are of the swamp with all its creepies and crawlies:

> Hiding dark recesses, coruscating
> Frigid confabulations—tortuous mass—
> Is forced up through dark a bubble, waiting,
> O, save it from the wind that sun may pierce,
> For the moon, the stars, heaven itself it bears.

The "musical" aspect of the poet ought not be overlooked. His Miltonic, as perhaps Eliot-influenced, speech rhythms are sufficiently individuated to become his own, and in some ways even Indianized—especially as the way he relies on exquisitely improvisatory cadence; also, his audacious linking of unpretentious directness, sudden joking, outburst, pure lyricism and eloquence are quite a feat. In truth an appreciation of him involves recognition that he is essentially an original who takes stylistic chances and yet speaks directly to us. The timid reader might try speaking the following moderate manifestation aloud a few times, just to get an ear in, as it were. It is the first stanza of "Uranium in the Soul":

> Disintegrating
> In sombre and sunny apprehensions,
> Futile thought and endless cogitation,
> The restless monkey-mind,
> In lusting, the insatiable longing
> For beauty, beauty that must die,. . .

The poet's fusion of a deep, simple, normal humanity with an encompassing aestheticism becomes in his art a programme for the redemption of what Yeats called "modern subjectivity" through a strategy for impersonality. Some of these poems express grief, frustration and in coming to terms with himself, or, sometimes, the mystery of fulfilment. In some way Narula's objective (as mythologic) formulations help him discipline a basic inwardness, chaotic and hyper-suggestible; that last is the chief danger, because it can so easily plunge to ruined negation, to the art of the age. Narula uses his objectivity to discipline that precarious perturbation—not to deny it, but to contain and reflect it.

Keshav Malik



Our Contributors

ACHARYA, NARAYAN (*b.* 1925)
Painter, held his own shows, exhibited at the Lalit Kala Akademi national and international exhibitions.

BHANDARI, RAJENDRA (*b.* 1955)
Nepali poet, with two collections; teaches at Sikkim Government College.

BISWAL, JAYANT K. (*b.* 1952)
Oriya short story writer and critic: teaches English in B.J.B. College, Bhubaneswar.

CHOWDHURI, PARTHA SARATHI (*b.* 1940)
Bengali poet with two collections; belongs to Indian Administrative Service; presently Chairman, Calcutta Improvement Trust.

DESHMUKH, JAYANT
Artist with Diploma in Fine Arts from Raipur; presently with Madhya Pradesh Ranga Mandal, Bhopal, as designer and actor.

ENGINEER, ASGHAR ALI (*b.* 1940)
A Civil Engineer, well-versed in Urdu, Persian and Arabic; presently Director, Institute of Islamic Studies, Bombay.

GADGIL, GANGADHAR (*b.* 1923)
Marathi short story writer, novelist, playwright and critic; Vice-President of Sahitya Akademi.

GOPALAKRISHNAN, SUDHA (*b.* 1954)
Writes in Malayalam and English; presently on the staff of the Sahitya Akademi.

GOVI, K.M. (*b.* 1930)
Wrote the first book in Malayalam on Library science; has

retired from the Central Reference Library, Calcutta.

GOVI, PUSHPAVENI (*b*. 1936)
On the staff of the National Library, Calcutta.

HAZRA, ANANDA GHOSH (*b*. 1939)
Bengali poet, with five collections; has published a study on the aesthetics of modern poetry.

JAYANTHAN, T.K.
Malayalam poet and translator; on the staff of Indian Overseas Bank, Trivandrum.

KHALING, DAN (*b*. 1929)
Nepali poet, short story writer, critic and translator.

KRISHNA WARRIOR, N.V. (*b*. 1916)
Malayalam poet, critic and editor; Sahitya Akademi Award and Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award winner.

KUMAR, SHIV K. (*b*. 1921)
Poet, playwright, novelist and critic in English; Sahitya Akademi Award winner.

MALIK, KESHAV (*b*. 1926)
Poet and critic in English; formerly editor of *Thought*, and of *Indian Literature*.

MORAES, J.B. (*b*. 1933)
Konkani poet; Sahitya Akademi Award winner.

NANDY, MANISH
Has published translations of Kalidasa's *Ritu Samhara*, modern Cuban poetry and a collection of sonnets.

NIRMAL SINGH (*b*. 1955)
Bachelor of Fine Arts from the College of Arts; teaches drawing at Guru Nanak Public School, New Delhi.

PANIKER, K. AYYAPPA (*b*. 1930)
Malayalam poet and critic; Sahitya Akademi Award and Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award winner.

RAJA RAO (*b.* 1909)
Novelist in English; Sahitya Akademi Award and Neustadt Prize winner.

RANGRA, RANAVIR (*b.* 1924)
Hindi writer and critic; formerly Director, Central Hindi Directorate.

ROY, DEBI (*b.* 1938)
Bengali poet, with six collections.

SRINIVASA IYENGAR, K.R. (*b.* 1908)
Poet and critic; author of *Indian Writing in English*; Fellow of Sahitya Akademi.

SUBRAHMANYAM, K. (b. 1929)
Has published over fifty short stories in Telugu, a dozen articles and a dozen translations.

SUBRAMANYAM, KA NAA (*b.* 1912)
Tamil poet, novelist and critic; Sahitya Akademi Award winner.

SUROOR, A.A. (*b.* 1912)
Urdu scholar, critic and Sahitya Akademi Award winner.

In the next issue of

Indian Literature

writers recall

Radhakrishnan

scholar, teacher, statesman

Vice-President (1954-62)

President (1964-67)

of

Sahitya Akademi

plus usual features

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Bipin Sharma

The drawings and facsimiles of MSS., etc. used in the Tagore Section from pp. 8-64 are by Rabindranath Tagore. Courtesy: Visva-Bharati.

Indian Literature

Sahitya Akademi's Literary Bi-monthly

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Dear Reader,

Tagore: 125—Searching for Relevance

THE legendary 'Pachise Baisakhi', the birthday of Poet Rabindranath Tagore, is once again here. Being the 125th, it should turn out to be special, meaning more productive, this time. We have to wait and see if it will really be so, or will just blow over like any others.

The *IL*, in these columns, in its No. 107 last year (May-June, 85), had expressed its distress at the way Tagore, the Gurudev of yester-years, had become a victim of neglect in recent times at the hands of his own countrymen. The intellectual climate of the country being what it is, it was not hoped that anything really earth-shaking would ever take place during his 125th birth-anniversary this year. As it is, let alone any great tremors, we do not hear even mild flutters around. At best, there are only some leaf-rustles here and there!

Probably, one of the most salutary things that has happened in the course of the year, something which was long overdue to Tagore, but was denied all these years and even during his Centenary 25 years ago and is hence worth noticing—mind you, it did not happen here in India or by one of us, but in England and by a Britisher—is the publication of the *Selected Poems*, translated by the young modern poet William Radice and published by the Penguins in their Modern Classics. The translation as such has elicited a mixed reaction. Some, consistent with

our still colonial mentality, have gone gaga over it. Others, in a true cavalier fashion, think it is 'more Radice than Tagore'. But Radice himself, very modest, does not make any tall claims. The important thing is that Radice is not a casual amateur. He is serious, committed. Also, he has more plans for Tagore in future.

Apart from the question of selections or translation, the significance of the Penguin book lies in this that it can help create a revival of world interest in Tagore, not in terms of blind adoration as had happened during his life-time, but in terms of his poetry. It may reasonably pave way for fresh translations in many languages of the world. Every great poet deserves such a re-birth in every age. He has to be 'remonetized' again and again to the new generations of readers in their changing modes of language. After all, a poet's guerdon is not gold or marble, but readers who read his works and try to find their moorings in his words.

THIS year, too, modest though, we have devoted a small chunk to Tagore. Probably, the more interesting part of it is the symposium, with eight Bengali poets participating.

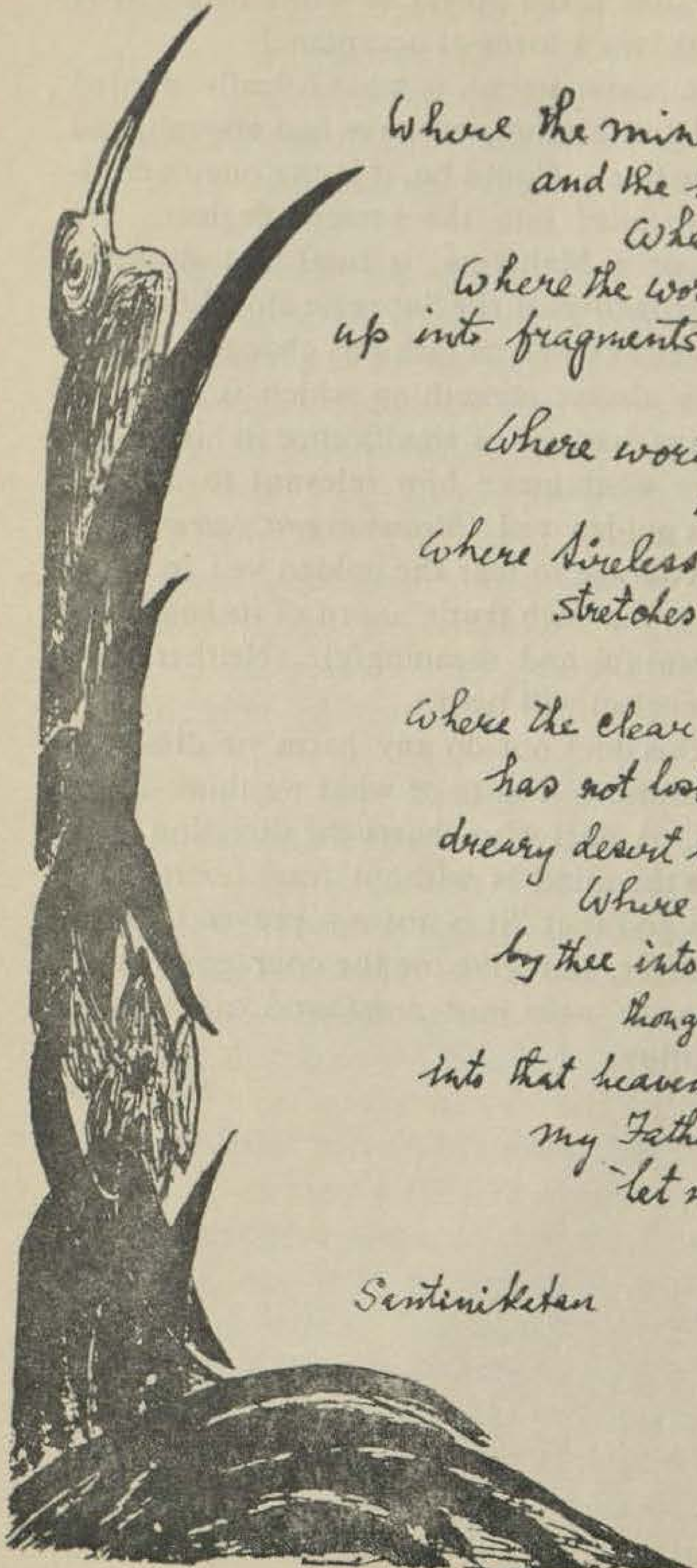
"How relevant is Tagore to you today?"—this was the simple, one-line question we asked of several outstanding Bengali poets. Why Bengali poets alone? If poetry is primarily language, it is they who are Tagore's direct inheritors, and they are the ones who would be familiar with all aspects of his work. With no holds barred, they were free to give an honest answer, as candid as they wished to make it. Eight of them, belonging to different generations have come forward with their answers. Of them, one is in his seventies, two in sixties, three in fifties, and two in forties. The answers are diverse. But be it noted that none of them lacks respect for the Poet. Nor, none rejects him outright. Tagore contained multitudes and the participants generally find some aspects of him relevant to them and reject others. (For one or two, the relevance is total.) Hadn't Tagore himself said, "I am able to love my God, because he gives me

freedom to deny him." 'Love' is the operative word here. It is that that turns even denial into a form of acceptance.

This type of inquiry, a reassessment, is what is badly needed today. Side-idolatry and cultification, we have had enough, and it has been counter-productive. Could be, it is the blind adoration in the past that has recoiled into the present neglect. No one, be he a Gurudev or a Mahatma, is total and absolute, which, if at all, is the prerogative of the Supreme alone! Besides, in literature, as in life, needs as well as fashions change. But in every great poet, there is always something which is universal and perennial. This, plus what is of significance in him at the given point of time, are what make him relevant to an age. Truth is hidden behind a golden veil (*hiranmayena patrena. . .*). We should not lack the courage to tear the golden veil in order to see the truth behind. And such truth, shorn of its beard and robe, can be more beautiful and meaningful. Neither blind adoration, nor callous neglect will help.

An exercise such as this does not do any harm or disservice to a poet of Tagore's stature. In spite of what we think are his blind spots, he is great. A poet who charts the direction of his country towards 'Where the mind is without fear' (*chitta jatha bhaya sunya*) or tells his god that "it is not my prayer that you should protect me in danger, but give me the courage to face it (*bipade more raksha karo/E nahe mor prarthana*) can only be great and stand any scrutiny.

S. Balu Rao



Where the mind is without fear
and the head is held high,
Where Knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken
up into fragments by narrow domestic
walls;
Where words come out from the
depth of truth;
Where tireless striving
stretches its arms towards
perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason
has not lost its way into the
dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward
by thee into ever-widening
thought and action—
Into that heaven of freedom,
my Father,
let my country awake.

Rabindranath Tagore

Santiniketan



Rabindranath Tagore

The Man of Faith

THE Man of faith moves on along pitiless paths strewn
with flints over scorching sands and steep
mountainous tracks.
They follow him, the strong and the weak, the aged and young,
the rulers of realms, the tillers of the soil.
Some grow weary and footsore, some angry and suspicious.
They ask at every dragging step,
'How much further is the end?'
The Man of faith sings in answer;
they scowl and shake their fists and yet they cannot resist him;
the pressure of the moving mass and indefinite
hope push them forward.
They shorten their sleep and curtail their rest,
they out-vie each other in their speed,
They are ever afraid lest they may be too late for their chance
while others be more fortunate.
The days pass,
the ever-receding horizon tempts them with renewed

lure of the unseen till they are sick.
Their faces harden, their curses grow louder and louder.

It is night.
The travellers spread their mats on the ground
under the banyan tree.
A gust of wind blows out the lamp
and the darkness deepens like a sleep into a swoon.
Someone from the crowd suddenly stands up
and pointing to the leader with merciless finger breaks out:
'False prophet, thou hast deceived us!'
Others take up the cry one by one,
women hiss their hatred and men growl.
At last one bolder than others suddenly deals him a blow.
They cannot see his face, but fall upon him in a fury
of destruction
and hit him till he lies prone upon the ground his life
extinct.
The night is still, the sound of the distant waterfall
comes muffled,
and a faint breath of jasmine floats in the air.

The pilgrims are afraid
The women begin to cry, the men in an agony of
wretchedness
shout at them to stop
Dogs break out barking and are cruelly whipped into
silence broken by moans.
The night seems endless and men and women begin to
wrangle as to who among them was to blame.
They shriek and shout and as they are ready
to unsheathe their knives
the darkness pales, the morning light overflows
the mountain tops.

Suddenly they become still and gasp for breath as they
        gaze at the figure lying dead.
The women sob out loud and men hide their faces in their hands.
A few try to slink away unnoticed,
    but their crime keeps them chained to their victim.
They ask each other in bewilderment,
        'Who will show us the path?'
The old man from the East bends his head and says:
        'The Victim.'
They sit still and silent.
    Again speaks the old man,
    'We refused him in doubt, we killed him in anger,
        now we shall accept him in love,
    for in his death he lives in the life of us all, the
        great Victim.'
And they all stand up and mingle their voices and sing,
        'Victory to the Victim.'

1931

Excerpt from 'The Child'



How relevant is Tagore today?

Eight Bengali Poets answer the Question

ARUN MITRA

RABINDRANATH TAGORE was a phenomenal genius. No writer in the history of Bengali literature and very few, I believe, in the history of world literature can compare with him in respect of creative energy and the variety and range of creation. Over and above, he broke fresh ground in the domain of music and painting. Here I shall confine myself to his literary work.

Tagore, as a thinker concerned with man's condition, is very much relevant to me today. The inclination of his mind to move on the metaphysical plane did not blind him to realities. He unmistakably discerned the material causes of the misery and suffering of mankind. His denunciation, in one form or another, of the corroding influence of money, the greed and inhumanity inherent in the colonial system, the tyranny and injustice seen all around does not reverberate in the cavern of a dead past. It reflects the reality of our time. His call for self-reliance, his

respect for the individual, his firm belief in the resurgence of man were all linked with the conception of an unshackled future. His vast works, particularly his writings in prose, give evidence of this contemporaneity.

As a creative writer, Tagore ceaselessly enriched every branch of literature. Bengalis may well look upon his achievement as magical. His hands shaped the modern Bengali language, nurturing it from its infancy to adulthood, fashioned a thousand and one poetical forms as spontaneously as one breathes. It was also he who for the first time expressed in Bengali the ideas of the poet about his own art.

However, if I am asked today whether his poetry attracts me as strongly as it did in my young days, I shall hardly be able to answer immediately in the affirmative. I shall have to admit in the end that a large part of it doesn't any more have much appeal for me. This is perhaps due to a change in the nature of my expectation. The tendency in these poems to transcend all conflicts and soar into a region of beauty and harmony prevents them from awaking a response in me. Perhaps another reason is that the belief Tagore expresses in the existence of a benevolent Providence does not fit in with what has been happening in the world I inhabit. Such poems very often leave an impression of wordiness on my mind.

But when I am making this reservation, I am speaking only of a part of the whole. There are numerous poems and songs of Tagore which are of a very different kind. The expression in these is simpler and more direct and has, at the same time, an indefinable ethereal quality which makes them great as lyrics. They seem to be infused with emotion in all its purity, and when I read them I feel I am touched by it. These poems and songs speak of love, nature and motherland, themes which at no time cease to be relevant. Because of the same qualities, even many of his devotional verses move me, irrespective of my personal belief. And there are also poems which enchant me by sheer music of words. In their case, I don't feel like bothering about their relevance.

SUBHAS MUKHOPADHYAY

I WAS a greenhorn, a mere school boy, rough-hewn, but audacious enough to send a letter in verse to Tagore, addressing him plainly as 'Rabi Babu', instead of 'Gurudev' or 'Rabindranath'. This was not out of any defiance, but, in a way, to talk him over without standing on ceremony.

In the opening few stanzas, I made my absolute fascination for his poetry manifest. Under its spell, I soared high in the sky indulging in reveries. But the moment I set my foot on the earth, the harsh realities of life swallowed me up.

In the concluding lines of my poem, it was suggested that the poet should either withdraw his poems from this world or change it into a better one.

The letter in verse was written almost half a century ago. Sometime later, it was published in *Bishan*, a contemporary Bengali weekly. The manuscript I had was seized by the police from a friend's house while I was in jail in 1948. All these years I have failed to procure a copy of it. I still really mind its loss. I attach some value to the poem not because of its high quality but it could give a quick glimpse of the budding poets of my generation in their first encounter with Tagore.

Imitation and exact alikes are abhorred in creative arts. Every writer of worth has to demarcate himself from all his predecessors. Tradition has to be carried forward with innovations.

One has to understand the predicaments of Post-Tagorean Bengali writers in this background. Tagore's influence was so overwhelming in every field that those who played safe and followed him closely soon lost their identity. Only poet Jatindranath Sengupta who chose invariably to look to the otherside of the coin could make his own mark.

Those who wrote after Tagore had to cut the Gordian knot. If they wrote the way Tagore wrote, nobody would pay any attention to them. But, then, how was one to escape him? That was precisely the problem of the new band of writers who made

their debut in the twenties. One of their protagonists almost pitifully clamoured—"In front of us is Rabindra Thakur blocking our way." Under the overshadowing personality of Tagore it was not an easy task to find one's own identity. Old wine in new bottles or new wine in old bottles would not help. Both in content and form one had to strike home.

Tagore is the life-breath of the modern Bengali language. The very tools we use today were, in the main, fashioned by him. To find one's own diction was not an easy thing to achieve. Freedom is the recognition of necessity. In human history, it started with magic. Through mimicry and imitation, gradually man gained the power to overcome nature.

A toddler holds his mother's hand when he learns to walk. After sometime, he lets go his mother's helping hand. From then on, he can stand on his own. But it does not mean that the one who can walk does not miss one's way or go astray.

After the first World War, the new trend-setters in Bengali literature came to be branded as 'modern' or 'ultra-modern.' Either mistakenly and mischievously, they were dubbed as 'break-aways'.

There were disturbing factors, no doubt, in that trend. In the name of newness, many a writer ran after exotic things. Naturalism took the place of Realism. Forgetting our own tradition and aping the west fast became a fashion. There was a breach between the writer and his readers. Through experience and through the teachings of Tagore who, in several instances, personally intervened and initiated a dialogue with the so-called modern writers and poets, the genuine writers at last found their roots. Through tortuous routes, the prodigal son returned home.

I remember my childhood days. At first, I had transient feelings of pleasing sights and sounds in contact with nature and people around me. In Tagore, I found the word-magic that can call up to mind anything anytime I wanted. It filled me with love for my country and my people. With his words, I could overcome grief and bask in sunshine.

"Did Tagore influence you to a large extent?"—I have often been asked by many writer-friends whose mother tongue is other than my own. It is not an influence. We were conditioned in the Tagore soil. We are dissimilar. It was bound to be. Like a tree, our roots we do not show. It is in the dark within. The sunlight is there to help us grow which everyone can see. It is a different story with the sap.

What about Tagore's world outlook? My childhood days were spent in a small town in North Bengal. Tagore was taboo to the Hindu elders. They considered him an iconoclast, undermining the age-old traditions and projecting humanism as the supreme value. The first to respond to the newly emerging Tagore culture were the young dare-devils of that town whom the elders put up with in spite of their sauciness and playful tricks. For, at the time of distress, everyone needed their selfless voluntary social services. Although themselves not so well-versed, they were the pioneers in introducing Tagore culture in that far-off place.

Tagore, being a man much ahead of his time, raised controversies all through his life and even after death; not only among the orthodox but also among the self-styled radical thinkers and progressive politicians. In his lifetime, Tagore never fought shy of controversies. He was attacked by his adversaries not only for his unusual content but also for his unconventional form. In fact, whatever is known as modern in Bengali literature has its source in Tagore.

It is a pity that when we dubbed Tagore as a bourgeois reactionary belonging to the Zamindar class, he was no longer there to answer back. But, in a different context, he had said:

> No one can write going beyond his experience. You may say that I do not understand a poor man's psychology. I do not grudge admitting it. You say, We belong to modern times, so we shall weep for the poor. . . By setting your seal to something from the start you reduce your value. Literature is not produced by acting together. Literature is the only creation that is done in loneliness. When it passes into the realm of group activity, it ceases to be literature. Everyone must have the self-esteem in him to concede: "Whatever

> I write is not for propagating the 'cult of the poor' or the 'epoch', but I write what I alone can say."

Besides being a master artist, Tagore was a great thinker as well as a man of action. Tagore carried forward the heritage of an ancient Rishi who used to combine in himself the functions of a poet, a social as well as a spiritual leader—all rolled into one. He is always with us in our victory and defeat, in our joy and sorrow, in sunshine and rain. With his compass, we can find our path on a murky sea. His commitment to life—'Salvation through renunciation, that is not for me. Bound by numerous ties I shall enjoy the most delightful taste of salvation'—will be our watchword all our way.

When we read Tagore between the lines, we discover with pleasant surprise that he invariably delineates the reality. Only he speaks in different terms.

According to the Bengali calendar we will be celebrating the 125th Birth Anniversary of Tagore in this Bengali year 1393. It reminds us of his poem, entitled '1400 B.S.', in which he addresses his future readers in the following terms:

> A hundred years hence, who are you, I wonder, reading that poem of mine with curiosity—a hundred years hence. . . A hundred years hence, who is the new poet singing at your home? I send to him the joyful greetings of today's spring.

Tagore wrote that poem in 1302 B.S., i.e., in 1895 A.D.

Now to pick up my story: In 1953, I had an occasion to meet Sudhakanta Roy Choudhury who had sent me a cryptic letter acknowledging the receipt of my poem addressed to Tagore. He took me aside and asked, "Are you not the same person who long ago sent Tagore a letter in verse?" I was dying with curiosity all those years to know Tagore's reaction to my poem. I could not but ask him just that. He said, "I read to him your poem. At first, Gurudev seemed to be enjoying. In the end, he became rather grave."

The answer completely satisfied me and, after long years, set my mind at rest.

NIRENDRANATH CHAKRAVARTI

THE word Tagore does not always mean the poet; quite often it means a whole culture. And whenever I think of that culture, it invariably reminds me of a deserted mansion on a sea-shore that I had once strayed into in my childhood. It was an awe-inspiring building of gigantic proportions with innumerable halls, bed-chambers, living rooms, anterooms, corridors, balconies and staircases, together with what once was a beautiful garden. A bewildered child, I wandered through the place for the best part of a summer day, and yet could not manage to see the whole of it. In fact, everytime I concluded that my exploration was complete, a new room or a new corridor, or yet another balcony or a spiral staircase that had escaped me earlier and still remained unexplored would come into my view.

But despite the similarities, there is a big difference. The mansion represented in this case by the culture that bears the stamp of Rabindranath Tagore can hardly be called a deserted place. Almost half a century has passed since the death of the man who was born a hundred and twentyfive years ago, but the huge structure has not only survived, but it has not even gathered the dust or the cobwebs of time. Perfectly habitable, it still remains occupied, and will, in all probability, remain so for many more generations. The reason is not far to seek. The role of Tagore-culture has not yet been played out, nor does it show any signs of wearing off. It is still very relevant in our life. In fact, the thoughts, and even the life styles, of millions of men and women are still being influenced by it. While many of them are fully aware of this, many more are not, but that does not make any real difference.

If you ask me what this culture stands for, I can straightaway answer that it stands for those values which constitute the very core of the lofty ideal of liberal humanism. The champions of the great intellectual upsurge which was witnessed in the nineteenth century in my part of the country and which has



come to be known as the Bengal Renaissance, valued this ideal more than anything else, and Tagore was the finest and the most complete product of that upsurge. While there were many other intellectual stalwarts —most of them were born before Tagore— who also held this ideal close to their hearts and fought for its triumph over the hangovers of medieval obscurantism, it was in Tagore's writings that the ideal found its clearest expressions. And when I talk of his writings, I do not mean his poetry only, but also his novels, short stories and plays, and— more especially— his essays. Set your eyes on any of his essays, and you will immediately see what I mean. Be it an essay on our rural economy, or a disourse on the crisis of civilization, even before you are through with it, you will almost see the mind of the great writer. You will see the man crusading against all forms of oppression and fighting for the restoration of human dignity.

How can I call this man irrelevant? I cannot do so unless and until I decide to discard and denigrate the very values on which I have so far pinned my faith.

ALOKERANJAN DASGUPTA

I HAVE been sitting in my chair, ruminatively, and even pacing up and down outside in the temple alley, but no statement forms itself regarding my attitude to Tagore at this juncture of time. Actually, I have tried to drive the thought deep into the recesses of my mind, fearing that the task was impossible for me. I wanted to shy away from the labour of mind. Or is it simply that I know I am not ready to make any such statement in view of my axiomatical allegiance to Tagore?

For if there is anything central there in my selective affinity with Rabindranath at all, it has to do with worship. I venture further and say that, in the light of my previous *puja* attitude to Tagore the Man, worship is central; at the core of reorientation of *being* in different proportions and in various ways, some almost unrecognizable even to those who commune through the work of art, including the producer. Somehow, somewhere, we must be, as Tagore taught me once, turned to God, or Totality, or Totality as a mode of Divinity—or all our action is fruitless. Not only the creator, hieratic mediator though he is, but all mankind and womankind, children—the element of reverence for the divine has to be there to give every doing worth, make it worthy of being, or having been, and so existing for ever.

This is the Tagorean *Weltanschauung* that has come to stay with me literally till today, viz., 2 October 1985, as the efflorescence of Indian aesthetics committed to ethics/metaphysics.

But exactly here the relevance of Tagore gets marred. An easily earned, or smoothly inherited, asset of totality can only, if at all, function as a convenient nimbus gilding the scene which is immensely complicated. Confronted with the global value flux and Third world reality, we are expected to struggle against self-indulgent and lip-deep sublimation and also against the belief that truth is static (By no means is Tagore's *Satya* static, but innocently malinterpreted so with attic faith by many of his blind devotees). Every perception of ours is obsolete one second



later. Our lives are, *in esse* a long act of discovery, without and within. And in this unending complex, subtle voyage of exploration, the artist in us all is the supreme guide who is not necessarily always grounded in reverence in the prevalent sense of the term. Further more, it is quite feasible to espouse a creed, theistic, or atheistic, and not to express the same in art. For one thing, we are attempting a sort of concomitant variation between *creed* and *expression*. And in this process there cannot be any bias whatsoever for this or that idealistic preoccupation. In fact, it is not in the ideational exposition, but in the Keatsian mode of exploration while composing (negative capability) that we are interested. It is the way of having the anonymous block of existence that matters to us. And this causes a sort of dichotomy of sensibility in me: Tagore the Man, in the given context, appeals to me much more than Tagore the Poet. To put it in a slightly different way, I am fascinated by the *Liedermacher*-(song-maker)-cum-painter Tagore who went in for abysmal exploration, sometimes without valuing the preordained mechan ism of divinty in life and art.

SUNIL GANGOPADHYAY

I LOVE Rabindranath. But the fact that there remains deep down in my heart a certain contempt towards some aspects of Tagore is also true. I tend to feel irritated whenever the subject of the 'Jivan-Devata' (Life's Deity) crops up. The talks he delivered, sitting on the built-in seat at Santiniketan, appear to be both artificial and trivial. When reading the thousands of letters written by him, I cannot but wonder how an artist of such tremendous magnitude could possibly have been so very self-deceiving. He had written so many letters to so many people, and yet nowhere did he reveal even a whit of his own true self, his real convictions.

There was a time when attacking Rabindranath had grown into a fashion. Starting from the beginning of the Kallol Yug, it prevailed right up to the end of the fifties. "Three double-kicks and the volumes of Tagore totter upon the foot-scraper"—so wrote a callow poet of the fifties. But the year of Rabindranath's Birth-centenary marked the end of such an attitude. There was a lot of fanfare: committees and meetings, countless magazines and special numbers; songs and musical soirees. At the end of all these festivities, it was apparent that Rabindranath had now been totally transformed into a picture or a photograph, and from now on, people would carefully and reverently keep his volumes in their show-cases, but no one would read them any more. The immense popularity of his ballets and musicals gradually grew dim. Even earlier, his poems had already been confined to the world of students and research scholars. Only his songs remained. But strangely enough, his songs acquired an incredible popularity. After the centenary celebrations, his songs obviously became the prime, if not the one and the only, music of the Bengalis. It was their love for Rabindranath's songs which influenced and inspired them to dig out the songs of Atul Prasad and Dwijendra Lal Ray from the womb of near-oblivion.



As a writer, Rabindranath is so great that any one trying to envy him would merely end up looking petty himself. As was the case with Dwijendra Lal, for a short while. But the anti-Tagore movement of the Kallol group was by no means prompted by envy. They merely wanted to outgrow the influence of Rabindranath— to step out of his shadow, as it were— and were quite justified in doing so. But although opposing Rabindranath had become a part of their strategy, they were appreciably close to his thoughts and ideas. But, of course, we do not know how the two real pioneers of modern Bengali literature— Jibanananda Das in poetry and Manik Bandopadhyay in prose—really felt about Rabindranath. Both of them had come a long way from Rabindranath's way of thinking and most probably neither of them ever looked back again.

My youth was spent well within the orbit of Rabindranath. Every young man of my generation read Rabindranath and Rabindranath alone. Almost crazily, one might say. Even in the early fifties, when we took up writing, the literary atmosphere was largely dazed with the brilliant rays of Rabindranath. All the important magazines and periodicals carried an abundance of raw and weak imitations of the poet. They were indeed queer specimens of poetry, with sole emphasis on rhyme and metre alone. In those days, 'Modern Poetry' was something to laugh at and joke about, even in erudite circles. Jibanananda was a much-ignored poet. For a long time, not even a single book of his was published.

Gradually, I too broke away from the poetry of Rabindranath. Not because any one had advised me to do so, nor under the influence of any particular literary group. It was because his poems gradually began to seem insipid to me. They seemed oversimplified. There was not enough of mystery about them. Lesser still, the joy of discovery. What had already been said in one stanza had merely been repeated in five others in a roundabout way.

But Rabindranath's prose continues to attract me. His assessments of various literary works written when he was quite young, his essays on ancient literature and folk-literature, each and every one of his short stories, quite a few of his novels and plays reveal a perfect prose-artist whose taste is infallible. They reveal the innermost heart of a great personality, the magnitude of which turns one speechless with wonder.

Even now, when his writings fall into my hands by chance, it gives me real pleasure to read his *Chaturanga*, *Jogajog* or *Char Adhyay* once again. But I also feel tempted to close the book while reading some other pieces. Many of his works seem to be full of hollow mouthfuls, high-sounding empty utterances.

But his songs have not grown outdated, not merely because of their exquisite tunes, nor because of the tremendous variety in their themes, but there is something more to them. A magic, a charishma, which is but another name for art. That is why his songs succeed in filling up our hearts to the brim even now. An oft-heard line or two suddenly light up the entire consciousness. Very often, I discover anew the remarkable beauty and deftness of his use of words. Listening to his songs when all alone, all of a sudden my eyes fill with tears. I have no hesitation in admitting this solitary fact. These tears flush the heart with joy. I feel grateful to Rabindranath because even today he is the keeper of so much happiness.

Tr. from Bengali by SWAPNA DUTTA

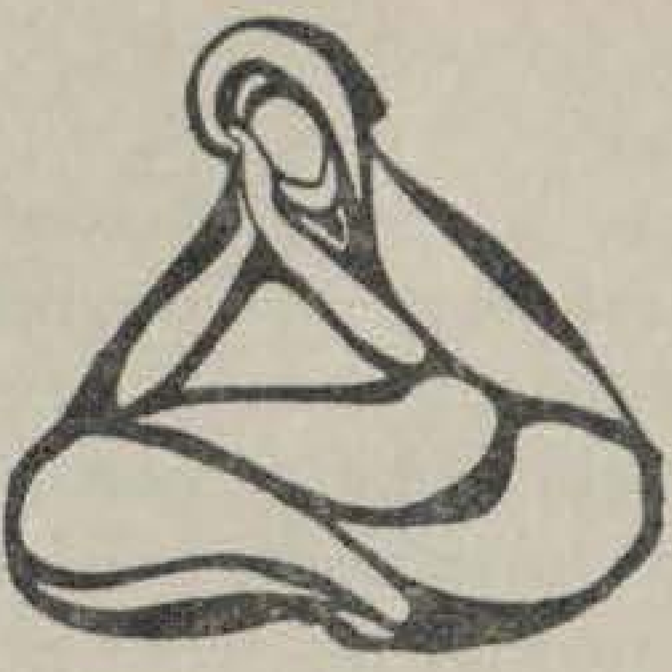
TAGORE'S RELEVANCE TODAY

KABITA SINHA

IT is a cliche these days to say that Tagore is a Museum piece. Intellectuals often abhor the populars. But fortunately I am neither a victim of cliche nor an intellectual, thank God! To me Tagore has been a dynamic life-force right from my childhood days. I grew up with his writings, dramas, songs and dances. His paintings are unique to me. Tagore, like one or two other great personalities, cannot be measured by our time-scale and the stamp of modernity. Tagore to me is eternally relevant and when our time-scale and modernity tarnish and get rusted, he will remain as fresh and shining as he is today. Let alone Tagore's literary works, when I go through his constructive ideas of farming, co-operative, economic and rural development, education, vocational education, self-employment, problems of language, communalism, separatism, casteism, and his attitude towards international affairs, sometimes I feel, he is almost writing for our present socialist society. His every idea was taken into our Constitution and the Five-Year Plans knowingly or unknowingly and I do not know how that happened.

About literature also, in some matters Tagore to me is still the last word. In my opinion, in Music and Drama, Tagore is still unsurpassed. Tagore's experimentation with Bengali language, rhythm and rhyme is unique. He never imitated even himself.

Tagore is great in International Relations. When he wrote 'Africa', a long poem, nobody had thought about the Black-continent. And now Africa is a topic of the day. In his lectures, he told the truth and never tried to please his foreign audiences. He was all along a protester. But his protest never took a crude form. We have seen his success, but have never tried to discover how much insult he had to bear. Death took away all his near and dear ones, but he never exhibited his sorrow in public. He was a man of simple habits. He never used the electric fan even in the worst summer of Santiniketan. His food was meagre



and simple. I never wrote any big articles on Tagore, because I always thought that my pen was too small for that. But I have written one hundred poems on 'Amal', who is the central character of the play, *Dakghar* (*The Post Office*) and created after his own image. The more I mature the more I realize how inevitable he is for our times.

Yes, Tagore has his influence on me. But remember, influence is not imitation. He influences me with his strength and positive attitude towards life. I have lived a life of struggle all through, which was full of tragedies. Whenever I have come to a breaking point I have got my inspiration from Tagore's writings and songs. Specially, my most favourite book is Tagore's *Chhinna Patravali*. This book is a collection of some of his letters written to his niece Indira Devi Choudhurani from his age of 26 to 36. At that time, Tagore had not anticipated his future success. Words and feelings came naturally and spontaneously and gave the writings a Biblical flavour. Only once have I written a short article on Tagore in my column in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in which I had written: "If I am deported to some island for life and allowed to take one book with me, that would be Tagore's *Chhinna Patravali*."

Every morning the Sun rises in the east, but does one ever think that the damn old haggard Sun is again coming up?

TAGORE'S RELEVANCE TODAY

PUSHKAR DASGUPTA

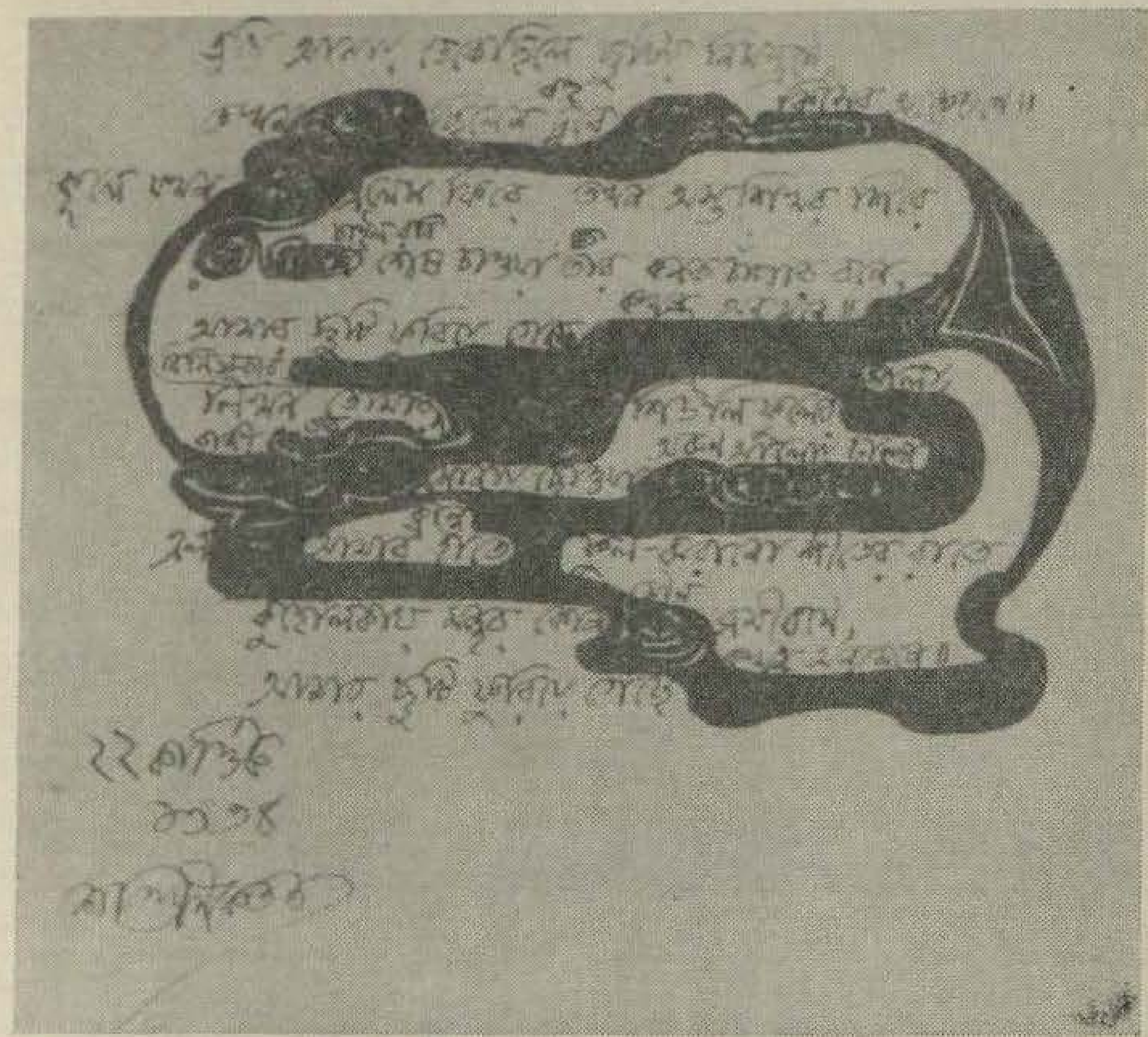
DO Bengalis read Tagore? A simple answer to this would be no, they do not. Then it could be added, Tagore has to be read in order to go through examinations in schools and colleges. And that pronounces the end to the reading of Tagore. The upper class, culture-oriented Bengali buys the complete works of Tagore brought out by the West Bengal Government and with it adorns the first row of his collection of books, listens to Rabindra Sangeet and crowds into soirees of dance-dramas or songs by Tagore.

Whether they read Tagore or not, to the Bengalis, he is a symbol of their self-pride. Thus they cannot bear his image to be touched; the slighest of criticism regarding Tagore makes them react strongly, is a blow to their pride. Tagore today is also the symbol of institutionalized 'Bengal-ism'. The political parties vie with one another to show their veneration for Tagore in order to win popularity. With a passing reference to Tagore as a littérateur, volumes are written and long speeches are made on his world-humanity, his Upanishadic exposition of the finite and the infinite, his nationalism and his internationalism. Yet Tagore's primary identity is in the fact that he is a poet, a writer of creative literature. The scope and extent of his writings are amazing. He entered very easily into almost all the domains of literature. Writing poems incessantly, he simultaneously wrote plays, novels, short stories, essays and children's literature. Of his large body of writings, there are some that even today move us as literature—his typical romantic poems, some of his last poems, a few short stories, the play *Dakghar*, the novel *Chaturanga* and so forth. There are many writings that do not touch us, for instance, the apparently metaphysical or the mystic poems from the period of *Naibedya* or *Gitanjali*, stories like 'Jibita O Mrita', 'Rabibar' or 'Laboratory', novels like *Shesher Kabita* and so forth. There are others which seem to have lost their relevance in the stream of time—plays like

Bisarjan, poems which had an immediate temporary relevance and fiction written in the vein of *Chokher Bali*.

From a larger perspective, Tagore's place in the history of Bengali literature is unique. He has given rise to an era, to a very important chapter in the history of Bengali literature. To me it is Tagore the writer of creative literature who is significant and relevant even today. On the other hand, his views regarding the theory of literature appear to me to be permeated with a subjective vagueness, his Brahmo philosophy unattractive, his ideas relating to education as Utopian in the modern context (the present state of Santiniketan bears proof of that) Inspired by nineteenth century humanism many of his memorable sayings are today cliches, unrelated to modern reality and exploited by opportunists. It pains me that in the last phase of his life Tagore's real identity to a certain extent remained hidden behind the symbolic cloak he donned. He was constantly playing roles, that of Gurudeva before his fellow-countrymen and that of the spokesman of 'Indianness' before foreigners. It is as a corollary that an unreal Tagore—Gurudeva, mystic, humanist, educationist, nationalist, the preacher of internationalism—became so important. This particular end of a great creative artist of the Bengali language annoys me as a writer in the same language.

Tagore to me is a significant writer of the past. He is not a Gurudeva to me, nor a revealer of Upanishadic truths. Different works of Tagore have made the reading of Bengali literature a richer experience to me. Many of his writings stir my memory. In the history of Bengali literature, he was not a revolutionary like Madhusudan Dutta, nor did he have the sharp rationalist intellect of a Bankimachandra Chattopadhyaya. He was of a different sort altogether, the possessor of a unique talent. But from a particular point of view today, I also feel that, while taking Bengali literature a long way ahead, his influence, to a certain extent, was harmful to the Bengali language. As the result of a Brahmo-Victorian mentality, he totally rejected the popular-level words and syntaxes in literature, making literary



From a Tagore Manuscript

language somewhat artificial and fragile. Because of his immense creative talent, the impact of this mentality was far-reaching. We have yet to recover from this impact. Yet in the years that followed we have covered a great distance. Several new chapters have been written in the history of Bengali literature. There have been the prose writers of the Kallol era, the modern poets of the thirties and even then we have not stood still. Today Tagore's relevance is a matter more to be pondered over by students of Bengali literature and researchers in their dissertations. While we, we will not forget Tagore the creative writer. Now and again we will turn to him. Whatever be his brilliance, he keeps receding into the distance, because we have to move forward.

SAJAL BANDYOPADHYAYA

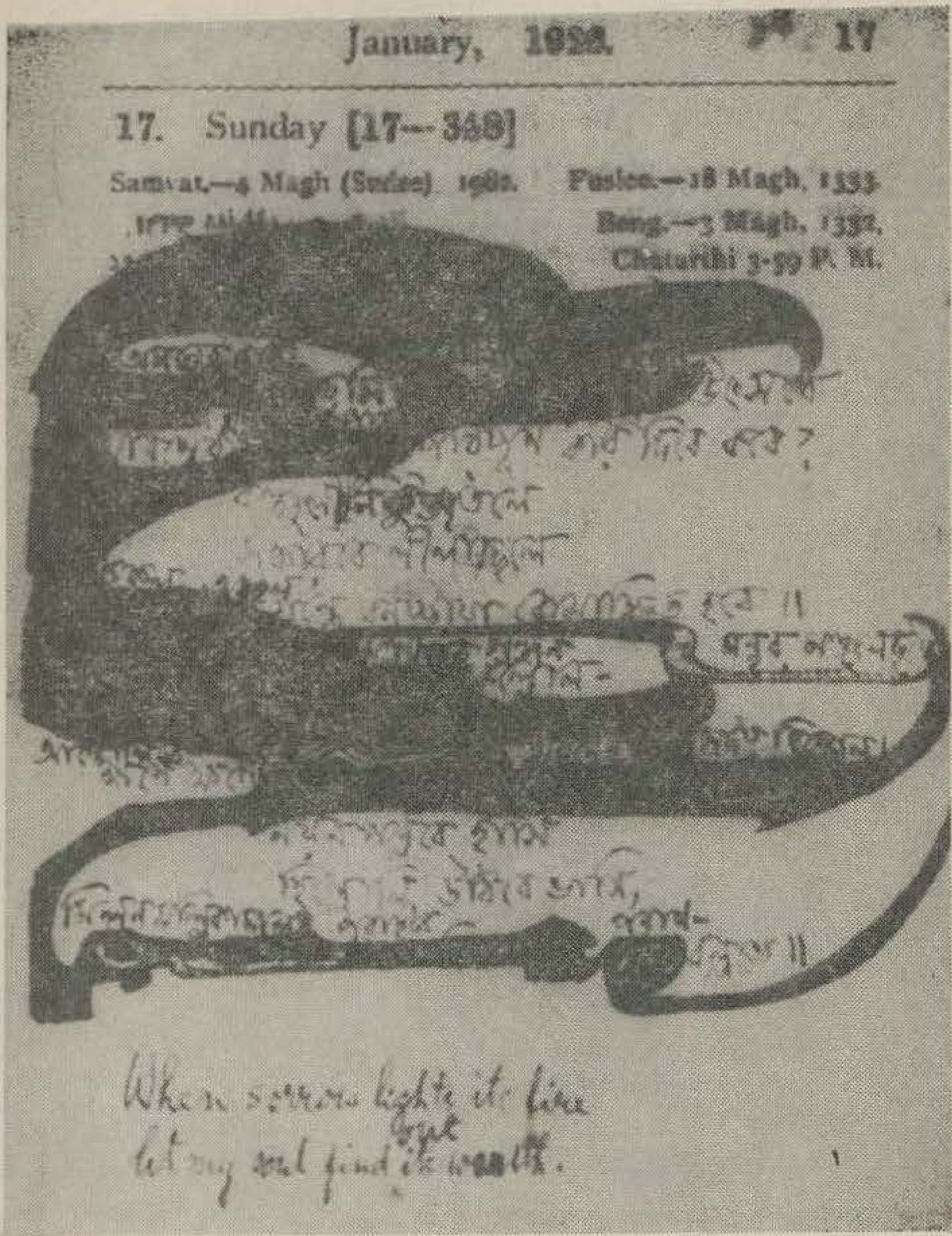
SINCE the time of Tagore, many years have passed. Social, economic and political conditions of the country have changed remarkably, but still when I go through the works of Tagore now, I cannot but enjoy them. I ask myself, "Why is it so?"

Yet, from the point of view of diction, i.e., the way of writing, poet Rabindranath does not inspire me greatly. I think we strive for precision more than he did. I know, quite many poets and critics will not agree with me. Because what we call modern poetry (poetry since the thirties) has not been able to spread its roots in society, in our Educational syllabi. That is why a good number of poets, though they are aware of the changes that have taken place in our time and society, follow his way. Another reason may be that the changes which have taken place in Bengali poetry after Tagore are not the result of a normal evolution. The so-called nature, i.e., the moon, the birds, the rivers, is still abundant in our poetry retaining its same old perspective.

As a thinker, as a short story writer and especially as a composer of songs, Rabindranath, I believe, is still a source of our inspiration. He believed in 'Unity in Diversity' and dreamt about a greater India, where irrespective of caste and creed, ordinary people will enjoy justice, where there will be no place for any kind of superstition. He expressed a better kind of national integrity. At the time of India's freedom movement, when he realized that selfishness and narrowmindedness were gaining an upper hand, he did not hesitate to react strongly.

Most of his short stories and a few novels enchant me for their sincere humanism and psychological depth. Some of the characters created by him do not still seem stale or outdated.

In the songs, his whole spiritual and human philosophy, his entire thought, his attitude towards man, country and the world are well condensed. The melodies of his songs are equally



A Page from Tagore's Diary

matchless. What an appealing synchronization of the Hindusthani classical music, folk and religious music of Bengal and of other States and Western music are they! I strongly believe that his songs (let me call them short poems) will be remembered for a long time to come.

As one reads the classics, I would like to read Rabindranath again and again whenever I find time and, no doubt, I enjoy and will continue to enjoy it. As a poet belonging to his future generation, I shall try my best to look for my own world and diction, where, with due respect to him, he stands far away from me.



Ten Rules for translating Tagore

WILLIAM RADICE

CAN one translate Tagore's poetry? Can one translate any poetry? This is the fundamental question. There is one school of thought that says that poetry—especially lyric poetry—cannot be translated at all. Dr E.V. Rieu, founder-editor of the Penguin Classics, felt that the best one could do was to translate poetry into prose, conveying the basic sense but leaving purely poetic qualities to those who could appreciate them in the original. The American poet Robert Frost said that poetry was what got *lost* in translation: the qualities that distinguish poetry from prose are precisely those that cannot be translated. Many is the time when I have doubted and despaired of the whole enterprise of translating a poet as complex and as lyrical as Tagore. Reviewers of my translations have pointed out the difficulties; even reviewers ignorant of Bengali have rightly sensed that there is something missing from even the best of what I have achieved. In his review in *The Sunday Times* in Britain, Ian Jack aptly quoted a Bengali gentleman's comment that 'Poetry in translation is like embroidery seen from the back'.

Yet if I did not feel that translation of poetry was possible up to a point, I would not be talking about it. In a way, translation is like marriage. Two people—the original poet and the translator—bring their two natures together to create a joint enterprise that is subtly different from their individual nature. The personality of the translator always comes into play; a translation of a poem can never be like a photo or carbon copy of the original. Well, we know that in life marriage can never be quite perfect, but most of us believe it is still worth attempting.

What are the main requirements for a successful translation of Tagore? I am talking now about Tagore and his poetry, not about translating poetry in general or translating Tagore's other writings. Every writer and every genre and every language poses its own set of translation problems.

I have drawn up a list of ten rules or principles, most of which I hope can be illustrated by translations from my Penguin book[1] or by its overall design. As I go through the list I hope, too, that some of my general ideas and feelings about Tagore's poetry will emerge.

1. *The work must be done slowly.* Some people have the idea that I have arrived—after only thirteen years of studying Bengali—at a complete knowledge of Tagore's poetry; and then they criticise me for failing to give a complete picture! No. My book is only a humble beginning. It will be followed, I hope, by other books that will add greater truth and detail to my picture of Tagore. But they will take time, and cannot be done in a hurry.

2. *The translations must be accurate.* Tagore's own translations at their best have merits that perhaps I cannot emulate, but they are not very accurate. Nor has there been any other translator of Tagore's poetry who had really inspired confidence in his accuracy. Of course, one could devote an entire lecture

[1] *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Poems.* Tr. by William Radice. Penguin Modern Classics. 1985.

to the problem of defining 'accuracy' in poetic translation. Edward Thompson's translations, for example, are usually quite accurate word-for-word, but they are 'inaccurate' when it comes to the spirit or tone of the original. The same could be said of some of my translations, and even at a word-for-word level there are some errors that have been rightly pointed out by Bengali critics and which I shall try to correct in the next printing of my book. Translation always involves compromise: sometimes one has to sacrifice literal meaning in order to achieve a particular formal or emotional effect. But my yardstick for accuracy in translation is that the translator should at least have *considered carefully* every single word in the original, even if he reluctantly decides that he cannot represent every word. I have indicated departures from literal accuracy in my notes at the end of my book (though space required me to limit the number of these 'translation notes').

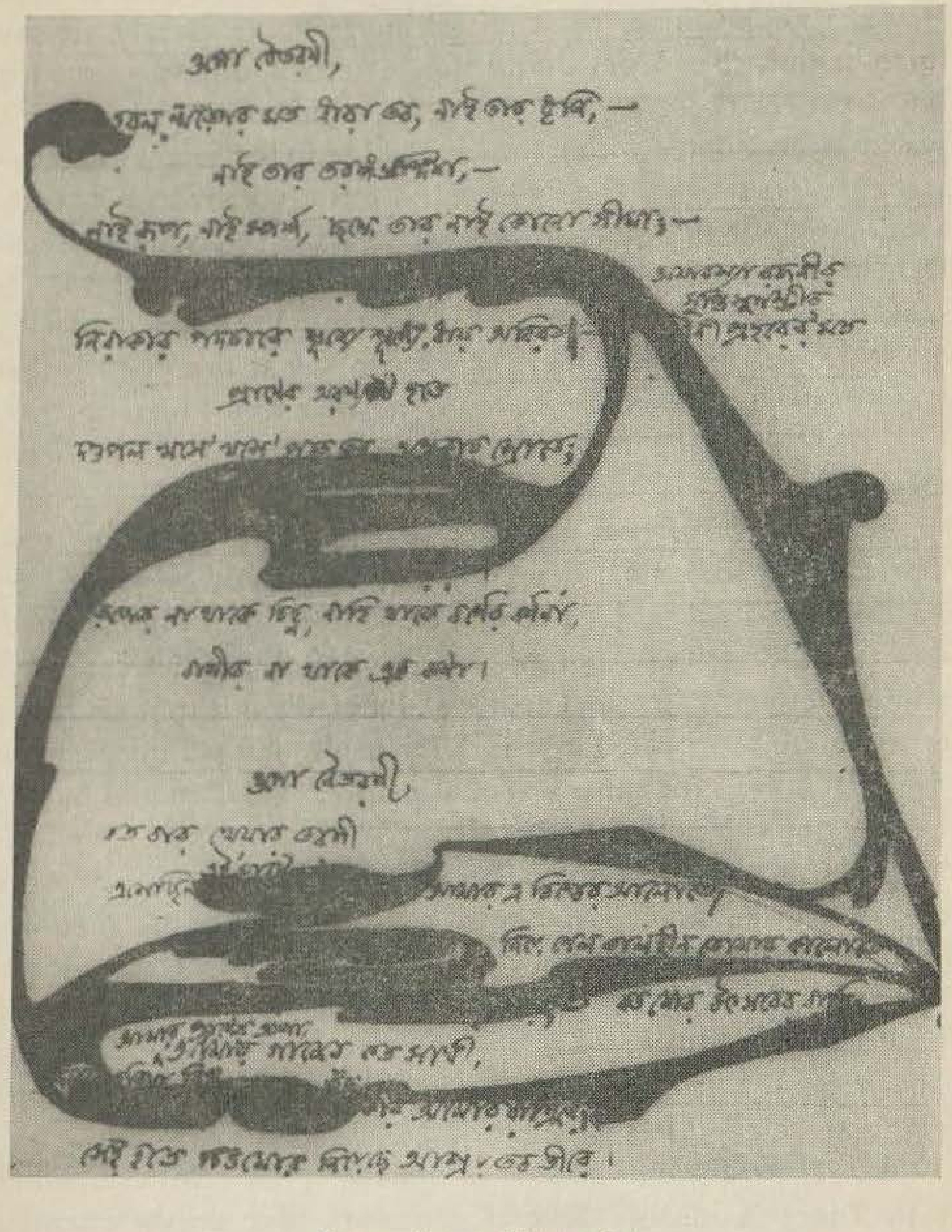
3. *The translations must be accompanied by explanation.* The notes and glossary in my book do not just deal with fine points of translation; they are also intended—as is the Introduction—to provide information about the background to Tagore's poetry and some guidance to its meaning. Information of this kind has been absent from translations of Tagore up till now (including his own translations: the Macmillan volume, *Collected Poems and Plays*, does not even tell the reader that Tagore wrote primarily in Bengali). It is especially necessary if Tagore is to find a readership again among non-Indians or non-Bengalis. The foreign reader has to be able to put Tagore into a context; if no explanatory information is given, he will be completely at sea

4. *Tagore's poetry should be translated into poetry.* This means that the translator should try to create equivalents for Tagore's wonderful range of verse-forms, metres and structural devices. This is probably an impossible ambition, and I leave it to others to judge how far it has been fulfilled in my book. But in Tagore's case particularly, so much of the meaning and power of the poetry derives from its form that I felt I had to try to

represent it. Although my mother Betty Radice did not live to see my book in its published form, I think she would have approved of my attempt to match verse-form in the original with verse-form in the translation; for when she succeeded E.V. Rieu as editor of the Penguin Classics, one of the main changes of direction was to commission verse-translations of poetry rather than the prose that he favoured.

5. *The translations should have depth.* By 'depth' I mean linguistic depth: that somehow the translator has to match up to the extraordinary way in which Tagore's use of Bengali incorporates the whole history of Bengali going back to Sanskrit. Again, this is no doubt an impossible ambition: one would have to be a Shakespeare to equal the linguistic wealth and virtuosity of *Tapobhaṅga* ('The Wakening of Siva'). One would have to live in Shakespeare's age, too, for English today is much more rigid and standardized than it was then. But not wholly so, for not only does it continue to change and develop, it also has the immense resources of its literary past to draw from. Somehow the translator has to tap these resources, incorporate into his translations the rhythmic and verbal glories of his own literary inheritance.

6. *The translator must be selective.* Someone recently pointed out to me a simple fact about Tagore that I had not previously considered. It is that there is no single great work that one can hold up as containing the essence of his genius, in the way that one can hold up Goethe's *Faust* or Tolstoy's *War and Peace* or Michael Madhusudan Datta's *Meghanād-bad Kābya*. Bengalis are therefore at a loss when asked by non-Bengalis, "Which work of Tagore should I read in order to understand why you think he was such a great writer?" Even if good translations were available, the problem would remain. Tagore certainly had a unified vision of life and art, but it expressed itself in a ceaseless flow of often short works rather than in a massive central work designed to crown his achievement. The translator is forced to be selective by the sheer abundance of material; but he also has an obligation to make his selection



From a Tagore Manuscript

as sensitively as possible so as to give an impression of the totality of Tagore's achievement, whether in poetry, prose, song, drama or any of his other genres.

My own selection of poems for my Penguin book has aroused a great deal of controversy. Some critics have called it per-

verse or distorted; others have argued that I have a perfect right to make an intuitive, personal selection—I say clearly in my Introduction that I am doing this. Actually I have a growing sympathy for those who have complained about the selection. I aimed in my book—within the limits of only fortyeight poems—at a total portrait of Tagore's poetry. But my knowlege is really too limited for that portrait to be true, so it is bound to seem distorted to those who know all the poetry better than I do. Is it, though, a slightly better likeness than has been drawn by other translators before me? All I can say at this point is that I hope in future books to build up a truer and fuller portrait, one that would be more closely in accord with Tagore's *Jīban-debatā*.

7. *The translation must have a unifying quality of rhythm.* This is really the same as saying that they must be guided by Tagore's *Jīban-debatā*. I have tried to explain this in my introduction, but perhaps not wholly successfully; so let me have another attempt here. Tagore undoubtedly felt that his entire creative life was guided by a mysterious destiny pulling him and pushing him in the same way that nature, evolution and human history are also guided by equally mysterious forces. One feels in the evolution of his art, as well as in every particular work that he created, an ebb and flow, a pattern, a rhythm that *was* his *Jīban-debatā* and his unique trademark as an artist. Somehow the translator has to capture this rhythm, whether through his handling of the rhythm of particular poems or through the way he makes his selection—through the contrasts, parallels and surprises entailed in that selection.

8. *The translator must have sympathy.* He must sympathise with Tagore's ideals. Several reviewers have drawn attention to the passages in my Introduction where I claim Tagore for my own generation of idealistic westerners. Of course, his appeal is much wider than that; but if there were no connecting bond of sympathy between Tagore's aspirations and my own, I would not have been attracted to him in the first place. At the same time the translator should maintain some measure of detachment.

Too close an identification clouds critical judgement and leads to hero-worship. My own poetry—and my enthusiasm for Madhusudan Datta as well as Tagore—are evidence of ways in which I feel separate from Tagore as well as close to him. (My 'marriage' analogy above springs to mind again here—husband and wife should not be *too* similar in temperament.)

9. *The translations should seem new.* One of the troubles, I think, with Edward Thompson's translations was that the poems did not (from the English reader's point of view) seem new enough: they seemed comfortably familiar and conventional. But Tagore belonged to an utterly different culture, language and literary tradition. A proper translation of Tagore should make his work accessible, yes, but it should also bring out its novelty, remoteness and strangeness. This strangeness, moreover, is not just a product of a different background; it is intrinsic to his greatness as an artist. All great artists are strange; if they cease to seem so, that is because we have become blasé about them through over-familiarity. Shakespeare tends to seem natural and normal to an English reader. But he was really a very strange writer indeed. So was Charles Dickens. So was Tagore. (I shall not mind if my translations make him seem a little stranger and less familiar to Bengali readers than perhaps they thought.)

10. *The work of translation should be done with love.* This is something deeper than the sympathy or affinity mentioned in 8 above True love embraces differences, flaws, failings as well as affinities. But I have said enough; this last of my ten rules should be felt, not laboured over with too many words. Let me end with some lines by Tagore that always occur to me when I think about the love that runs through his art and the love that I have myself felt when translating him: the conclusion of 'Gān-bhaṅga' ('Broken Song'). They remind us too that the poet's or translator's work does not end with the poem or translation: readers, or listeners, have to come along to complete it:

Baraj says with hands clasped, 'Master, our days are gone.
New men have come now, new styles and customs in the world.

The court we kept is deserted—only the two of us are left.
Don't ask anyone to listen to me now, I beg you at your feet, my lord.
The singer alone does not make a song, there has to be someone who hears:
One man opens his throat to sing, the other sings in his mind.
Only when waves fall on the shore do they make a harmonious sound;
Only when breezes shake the woods do we hear a rustling in the leaves.
Only from a marriage of two forces does music arise in the world.
Where there is no love, where listeners are dumb, there never can be song.'



Extremism v. 'Grande Passion'

A Study of Tagore's 'Char Adhyaya'

SISIRKUMAR GHOSE

IS THE DESTINY of man spelt in political terms? It seems Vyasa, Homer, Dante and Milton were not above the battle. People in the colonies anyway cannot avoid confrontation with the rulers. It was the same in British India. In this respect the Mahatma was an exception proving the rule. Revolution, insurrection, terrorism have been the syntax of national self-determination. In recent times, there have been two extremist waves: the first at the turn of the century, during the Swadeshi days; the second during the thirties. Both apparently 'failed', but each had its folklore and legendary heroes. The dichotomy of ends and means did not affect admiration.

Tagore was uncompromisingly against violence and the underground, which he had described as a 'nightmarish road' (*bibhisikar path*). His farewell to politics was partly due to this. As the renouncing of the Knighthood and the letters to Yone Noguchi and Miss Rathbone will show, it was not easy to avoid

politics. But he had more or less withdrawn from the fray, and assumed the role of a National Sage. It was strange that late in life, he was seventyfour, he came out with a novella, *Char Adhyaya* (*Four Chapters*) carefully slanted against the underground. The administration saw its chance and was quick to cash in on it. The book was freely distributed among the political convicts and undertrials. Understandably, they were angry at what could not but construe as a betrayal, as little better than a gilded, grisly parody. There was a burst of controversy. Somewhat unconvincingly, Tagore tried to defend himself. The controversy has died down, though the embers still fly. The book has taken a back seat among his novels, not a patch on *Gora* or *Ghare Baire*, not to mention Bankimchandra's *Anandmath* or Saratchandra's *Pather Dabi*. But what was *Four Chapters* really like and why did he write it?

Tagore's defence proceeds on two lines; ideological and thematic. In a work of art, ideology, he argues, is less important than theme. "Much of the controversy over my *Four Chapters* falls outside the province of literary criticism." Again: "Controversy over the political context seems unnecessary." "It is unnecessary in any literary approach to discuss whether it propagates a particular creed or moral." One sees through the tendentious logic. Tagore very definitely *used* the 'political context' to convey his strong anti-terrorist attitude. He must have thought that the country, the young in particular, were being misled. The moral is unmistakable. Someone has called it didactic (*upadeshatmak*).

His other confession virtually concedes the point: "The struggle I have naturally seen according to my own light." This right we may not deny. Pasternak, too, had his own version or vision of the Russian Revolution. It was obviously not favourable. But others have the same right to judge their works according to their own light. It is, however, the final argument, the most basic, that affords Tagore a characteristic route of escape. The only theme of the book, we are told, "is the love of Ela and Atindra (Atin/Ontu) . . . two modern Bengali

lovers". The 'modernity' is a matter of opinion. Modern lovers will perhaps be more cynical than Shelleyan. But the question surely is: where was the compulsion to mix it up with the sordid abyss of a secret terrorist society? As anyone can see, two motives interact: political extremism and *grande passion*. Of the two, he understood the second better than the first. It is obvious with which of the two the poet's sympathy lies. Elsewhere, he did say a few good words about the 'boys', but that is not the impression the book conveys. The damage had been done and Tagore has to take his share. Why he did it, he never tells us.

But if the novel runs into difficulties it is because of its politics. It is a weak novel. As a critic has pointed out, the book lacks the "life-breath of a novel". It has no action. The mastermind, Indranath, lacks credibility. In a different way, Atin too is not so real. Ela is more an idea than a person. Word-drunk (*kathaye payechhe*), they all talk alike. The language is too good to be good. Sometime Atin and Indranath use the same poetic syntax, the metaphors are transferable. The novel displays Tagore's easy verbal wizardry, but not enough to keep the novel alive. As Nazia Jasmine Choudhury puts it, Ela does not speak prose, it is as if she is reciting verse (*katha bolena, jeno avritti kore kabita*). Action, character, language remain disparate. There is even a touch of melodrama in the frequent use of peremptory message and dubious, diabolic whistles in the distance. Srikumar Banerji calls the whistles fake and theatrical (*rangalayar meki whistle*).

Tagore, of course, had no direct knowlege of the terrorist groups or movement and his reference to Brahmabandhab, which he later withdrew, was inexcusable. Indranath is not Brahmabandhab. In fact, he is not even a convincing character. A frustrated wordspinner, an egotistical Sublime, he wants to prove his greatness (*ami pramana korte chai ami barho*), "even if that entails disaster at every step". He is not the stuff that makes a national leader. There is little nobility and no largeness about him. Tagore's imagination was inadequate to present

a real revolutionary. As Satyabrata Dey has rightly complained, the portrait is neither true, complete nor even respectable. Indranath is a man without feeling and coolly believes that the *Gita* is on his side. But why has he chosen this path? A brilliant, foiled scientist, on return home, he finds all doors of advancement closed to him only because, while abroad, he had come in contact with a political suspect. He resigns his college post, starts a coaching class in French and German, Botany and Geology. Slowly this fans out into a secret society.

Curiously, he is not a patriot. His asides are acerbic. "Only the incurably immature revel in calling their country 'Mother'. Our country is not the Mother of senile infants." He takes a snide view of the nationalist ethos. Among the novel's three major characters, none has joined because of love of country. What you call a patriot that I am not, Atin speaks for all three. Everyone has his or her own reason—except perhaps the right one—for joining the revolutionary group. Indranath is not even anti-British and gives them an unexpected certificate: "The British are the best of the Westerners." He admires their "better nature". For his own scheme he does not expect any success. It is but an experiment (*amar rasayanar karkhana*). He is better able to hold forth than to lead a people.

For all his superiority, he has a capacity for spying on his followers and endlessly interfering with their private lives. While members are forbidden to marry, he forces Uma to marry, not Sukumar whom she loves—Sukumar is indispensable for party work—but the upcountry Bhogilal, for whom every Bengali girl is an incarnation. He pontificates: "This kind of rubbish has to be thrown out . . . the most suitable dustbin for them is marriage."

He breaks up Ela's party, writes an article in her name without telling her, sends a new recruit to attack her at night, to 'test' both of them. When Ela's karate leaves him with a broken limb, the Big Brother, who has been waiting downstairs, sets the bone right. When Ela visits Atin's hideout or Atin comes to her, Indranath, ubiquitious, either sends messages or appears at the

scene, as if he has nothing else to do. A deluded sadist and megalomaniac, he is unreal and unlikely.

He thinks himself to be infallible when he is not. In a chance encounter, he had picked up Ela. Later, when she wishes to be let off, he does not agree. "You know, I practically do nothing for you " Then why has she been allowed to remain? Indranath explains. The scientist is also a bit of a Tantric. Even though he scorns the matriolaky of the nationalists, he tells Ela: "Much the bigger thing is that sex is the embodiment of power. You have to prove this." That Ela might one day prove a power greater than sex never occurs to Indranath. Though he puts it poetically, the reason is simple: she is uncommonly pretty. "It is hardly possible for you to know," he tells Ela, "the glow that lights up the hearts of the boys when you annoint their foreheads with the red sandalwood paste of initiation." That this is insulting he has no idea.

But things get out of hand. There is a star-crossed meeting of Ela and Atin on a steamer at Mokameh Ghat. (There are lovely flashbacks—"the refrain of my new life"—in Chapters Two and Three.) Atin, in silk array, "a lotus among weeds", Ela's words, is in the first class, and she a deck passenger. "Why don't you wear khadi?" was the unprovoked question she asked Atin. That was the beginning, the beginning of the end as it turns out. A dutiful party girl, she inducts Atin into the 'band'. It doesn't take her too long to realize that she has done him a great wrong and violated his nature. ("Why did you make me guilty of doing you this injury?" she asks later.) When Atin insists they live together, alone, the only answer she can give is: "I had no choice. I had already sworn to devote myself to my country, not to have anything for myself alone. My betrothal was to my country." Later, more simply: "I had promised not to marry."

Atin is there for her sake. But gradually the work drags him down. He has seen at close quarters the loss of integrity even among the best of the boys. "Meanness, unfaithfulness, mutual distrust, secret machinations, plotting for leadership—sooner or

later, these drag them down into the mud at the bottom. That the life of the country can be saved by killing its soul, the monstrously false doctrine that the nationalists all over the world are bellowing. . ." "I have come down to the last rung of my degradation. The other day, our band robbed a helpless old widow. Our Manmatha belonged to the same village and had shown the way. She made him out through the mask and begged: 'Manu, my son, how could you have the heart. . .' She was not allowed to finish."

When Atin had confessed his love, Ela had tried to restrain him. But slowly a change comes over her. But Atin too changes, in the reverse. "If only you knew what I am now, you would tremble from head to foot." It is now—too, too late—Ela who wants Atin to give up the party and marry her. Indranath and her myrmidons fill the air. When Ela goes to meet Atin in his hideout or Atin comes to meet Ela, mysterious codes arrive, asking him to leave at once. Honour-bound, he does.

Ela asks, again, Indranath to let her go. Her heart is elsewhere. Indranath knows. For no good reason, or maybe it is another of his 'tests', he asks her: "Suppose he (Atin) becomes a source of danger to our cause, could you kill him?" "I know one thing for certain," she replies. "You chose me by mistake." "On the contrary, I am certain I made no mistake." "I beg you," she continues, "to release Atin." This is quite beautiful. She is not thinking of herself and she is not afraid. What follows is ghastly. Information has reached party headquarters that Ela was to be arrested at early dawn. (Perhaps, the doubt cannot but occur, it was the party that had done her in.) Batu, one of the well-drawn low characters belonging to the cadre, sends a private note to Ela. If she agrees to marry him, he would secure her release. Ela had spurned that offer and was waiting for the inevitable. When walks in Atin (the reason will come a little later) and starts a rambling conversation before coming to the point. A poet to the end, he has, he says, come to claim "the last kiss". Ela understands that, ordered by the party, and that must mean Indranath, Atin has been deputed to kill her. But

why? She knows too much about the party and might break under torture. "Never," she protests. In Tagore, romanticism, even in ruin, sings.

What follows is stunning. Atin orders her brusquely to go to bed. She says sleep will not come. "I have brought medicine that will put you to sleep". Atin's words are revealing: Her reaction is a marvellous *tour de force*. "Kill me, Ontu, kill me with your own hands. I could not wish for a happier end." She got up from the floor and, throwing her arms round him, kissed him again and again. "Kill me, Atin, kill me now. Am I not yours, wholly yours, even in death? Take me. Don't let their unclean hands touch me. This body belongs to you. . . It is chloroform you have brought? Throw it away. Let the last bit of my consciousness be for you. Let me die, awake, in your arms. Let our last kiss be eternal, Ontu, my Ontu." With that cry the novel closes. "From afar came the thin sound of a whistle"—one doesn't know what made Tagore put in that anti-climax.

Four Chapters is not a political novel, but, if anything, an anti-political novel. Maybe it is not a novel at all, but a love-song set amidst filth and grime, an imaginary, de-humanized milieu, with which it has no real connection. Love is greater than love of country, is a familiar Tagore thesis, as in *Gora*. But never was the cry so piercing. Atin, her god, has failed. But not she. The duet of Eros and Thanatos, its lyric crescendo, creates a world within world, world-without-end. *Four Chapters* lives by its romantic poetry. That such love may be without social bearing does not trouble Tagore. If this is Tagore's critique of revolution and nationalism, there is little to argue. Aesthetics is rarely a safe guide to history. Even so, poetry that proves nothing outlasts politics, outlasts history. Ela's final gesture has all the sublimity of an archetypal sacrifice. It lifts the otherwise inconsequential book, divided between pathos and perversity, aversion and accolade, to an empyrean of its own.

Perhaps the old man was right after all.



Kabir in Tagore's Translation

ASHOK KUMAR JHA

AS IF conscious of the limitation of translating a text, Evelyn Underhill, in her introduction to *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, points out that Kabir is able to dramatize his symbols, and that he uses all the senses in communicating his experience. To state in advance to the reader what a text appears to lose in taking to the medium of another person, Underhill takes pains to mention Kabir's use of popular Hindi to his purposes, the closeness of the language of his songs to common life and a poetic use of material from popular Hinduism of his time as he draws upon symbols and images from contemporary life. Tagore's attempt with Underhill at introducing Kabir to the western world could be taken to be largely successful.

And yet, in spite of the success a translation may have, there are certain questions that inevitably follow. For example, there is the important question of the relation of a secondary creation to the original. Sometimes the gap between the original and its translation may be a little too wide as is the stand of T.S. Eliot in respect of Gilbert Murray's translation of the Greek

plays. That in the case of a translator so gifted as Rabindranath, the limitation proceeds from a difference of what his own verse is and what it can be in relation to Kabir has been stated by Edward Thompson. What concerns us here is what Kabir may lose in being translated. As if conscious of a possible loss in such an effort, Underhill says:

> The constant insistence on simplicity and directness, the hatred of all abstractions and philosophizings. . . are amongst his most marked characteristics.

This is mainly a statement about the nature of experience, what Richards calls the 'critical' part in a work of art. It is because of the directness of an approach to reality with the kind of monism which is implicit in his attitude of protest and rejection that Kabir is acceptable to people:

> God is that Root where all manifestations, 'material' and 'spiritual', alike proceed; God is the only need of man—'happiness shall be yours when you come to the Root'.

On the philosophical side, such 'eclecticism' implies 'vedantist and vaisnavite, pantheist and Transcedentalist, Brahman and Sufi' ideas and beliefs. That Tagore himself was under the influence of some of these ideas and beliefs and his almost constant preoccupation with the poet's craft make him an ardent translator of Kabir.

But there are differences between Kabir, the humble weaver, who passes into a sect because of his life and songs, and Rabindranath, the versatile experimenter of many forms and genres, for whom the translation could not have been more than an important side-affair. This is not to lessen the value of the translation, but to set limits within which it can be judged, in spite of its success, against the original. Thompson is close to to what Tagore and Kabir can be together. But he seems to undermine the value of the derived in the making of a poet, when he attributes the liveliness of Kabir's verse to a mere rela-

tion to its time.

For a person so keen of mind and sharp of speech as Kabir, the ignorance of the written word became a regulating compulsion that made his speech the sharper in verse. In Rabindranath, the area of experience on which his poetry draws as well as awareness of the past behind such a practice is wider. By constant exercise of himself, he has disciplined his wide awareness of literature in several traditions to serve his particular needs as a poet. While his training in the poet's craft or his discipline as a poet does not affect the ease of his utterance as a poet, he does bring into effect part of his beliefs and training in translating Kabir.

What has he, then, in common with Kabir that impels him to present Kabir to the western world? Writing much later, Rabindranath is appreciative of the Bauls of Bengal for what they offer. He thinks they have, as religion, a framework of beliefs without the formal framework of a religion.

Like Kabir, there is a protestant element in Tagore's stand in respect of sanctioned values of the traditional religion. His admiration for Buddhism cannot be concealed. A protestant belief close enough to the traditional fold to be a worthwhile offshoot, and yet distant enough to reject much of what is orthodox, can be seen at work in what Tagore inherits from his father. Also what comes from the Upanishads, Kabir and Raja Rammohun Roy may have blended into one as an influence behind Tagore's protestant zeal to bypass the demands of a stratified society and the external authority of religion.

It is a falsehood often practised in our discussion of 'uneducated' men like Kabir or Ramakrishna that the extent of their reliable knowledge could not be of much value for consistent academic investigation. What Shakespeare could absorb out of one page of Plutarch, Kabir could glean from his associations with Ramananda and the ethos around him in Benares. Like Ramakrishna's use of the Vedantic ideas, Kabir's use of such ideas is considerable, leading one from their popular sources to Ramananda and Ramanuja and the Upanishads themselves.

In the more educated personality of Rabindranath, the Upanishads become more of a derived influence. Under such influences as those of Kabir and Buddhism, it may appear for a time that the preparation of life—as far as it consists of the common experience of living—is limited in view of that awareness of an ineffable source of Reality. But more than Kabir, perhaps under Chaitanya's latest influence in Bengali tradition, he is led to an affirmation on the side of joy in faith even through the senses which may be close to the explicit intention of his prose works.

And yet like the Bauls, Kabir attracts him as the example of a use of religion outside its authoritative fold. Kabir's language must have been an impediment to him. Even Vidyapati, whom he used as a model in *Bhanusingher Padavali*, offered him some difficulty:

> Vidyapati's quaint and corrupt Maithili language attracted me all the more because of its unintelligibility.

That the verse which could have been archaic for him could be adapted and absorbed into his needs was possible because of an existing influence of this kind in the Bengali language and literature earlier to him. The mastery of a technique in modern Bengali coming of the practice of the poets from the west was, properly speaking, a use of the Brajabuli influence to a new purpose in the verse of a modern poet. This brought with it also a cultural awareness:

> Those who have studied the lives and writings of our medieval saints, and all the great religious movements that sprang up in the time of the Muhammadan rule, know how deep is our debt to this foreign current that has so intimately mingled with our life.

There is a difference between a correct translation of verse into equivalent prose by a scholar and the translation by an amateur scholar and craftsman of verse. An able translator will, as often as not, eschew the merely literal. But he may in the process lose something of the freshness and appeal of the

original. If the translator is not a poet himself, which means that the translated work must be dependent on his use of language and diction elsewhere, and if he wants to keep to verse patterns that he wants to translate, it is most likely that he will draw on the available rhetoric and diction of verse in his time. In doing so, although handicapped by what is the creation and convention of other men, he is yet useful to them in extending the apparatus of communication they had created in respect of new things.

But, if like Rabindranath, he is a master of his own craft, what he puts into English is not only a correct translation, but it becomes some sort of a valuable translation of the original into a new form available to a foreigner now in his own language. For the language into which it has been translated, it brings something new into existence. As Kabir goes by a dependence on the high and intense rhythms of a song, which are essentially untranslatable in any other tongue, it is safer to try get to Kabir in trying to put his songs into a form devoid of that ingredient poetic form and its necessary accompaniments that constitute a song of Kabir. Tagore himself is capable of high and intenese rhythms in poetry in Bengali, but trying to translate into English the Hindi songs of Kabir, he takes to the more sober medium of prose. Thus the translation of:

Pīle pyālā ho matwālā pyālā nām amīrasa kā re
bālpanā sab khel gaṅvāyā tarun bhayā nārī bas kā re
Biradh gayā kaph vāyu ne gherā, khāt paṛā na jāya khasakā re
nābhi kamal bich dai kastūrī, jaise mirag phirē ban kā re
Bin satgur itnā dukh pāyā, vaid milā nahi is tan kā re
mātu-pitā-bandhu-sut-tiriyā, sang nahīn koi jāv sakā re
Jab lag jīve guru gun legā, dhan jīvan hai din das kā re
chourasī jo ubarā chāhe chōṛi kāmini kā chasakā re
Kahai kabīr sunāu bhai sādhau, nakh sikh pūrā rahā bisakā re

shows how he takes recourse to simple English to express what is unique in a literature. The expression, 'Empty the cup! O be drunken.' for '*pīle pyālā ho matwālā*' is hardly just to the export of feeling in the spoken idiom of native speech in Kabir,

which is hard to get to even for a poet like Rabindranath. The other half of the verse line, *pyālā nām amīrasa kā re*, is translated easily into a sort of prose, "Drink the divine nectar of his Name!" that tries its best to reach up to the intensity of the original in terms of a foreign idiom.

Sometimes, in Kabir, the verve and vigour of a localized idiom—within the diction available to him—becomes so adequate in terms of the communicated effect that a translation appears to be begging the issue. It is perhaps because of such a difficulty that the lines that follow have been left out. The translation is completed by merely expressing in English "Kabir says: Listen to me, dear Sadhu!/ From the sole of the feet to the crown of the head this mind is filled with poison", what the last line in the poem itself says so deftly, at the head of all that precedes *'Kahai kabīr sunāu bhāi sādhau nakh sīkh pūrā rahā bisakā re!'*

Tagore is happiest at translating verse lines that are less localized to their idiomatic vigour and sharpness, or in any case verse lines or poems that are closer to his own sympathies as they express the infinite. Thus, for:

> *Sunatā nahīṅ dhun kī khabar anhad kā bājā bājathā*
> *rasa mandir bājatā bāhar sune to kya huā*

we have:

> Have you not heard the tune which the unstruck Music is playing? In the midst of the chamber the harp of joy is gently and sweetly played; and where is the need of going without to hear it ?

The more literary as well as sophisticated approach to the original in translation is the gift of an educated sensibility. At his best, the translator makes his English come beyond the stereotyped syntax and idiom of his contemporaries to the largely self-educated needs of a man of letters to communicate what could be of a foreign culture and language. In this, he had his forerunners who had popularized vedantic ideas in the west

but the inherence of these ideas in terms of the manifest personality of a poet and his songs could very well be the preoccupation of a gifted translator. A perception of a lack of reality beneath the appearance, thus, is the main preoccupation in the original in these lines:

Jog' digambar sevaṛā kapaṛā range lāl meṅ!
wākif nahiṅ us raṅge se kaparā raṅge se kyā huā!!

A translation of these lines has to be more even against the uneven and irregular tone of the original:

The Yogi dyes his garments with red: but if he knows naught of that colour of love, what does it avail though his garments be tinted?

What Tagore contributes in spite of his handicaps is a clear communication of the experience and intention of the original. What he lacks by way of tone and rhythm, he tries to compensate by supplying us with what he has himself created. Even in his prose, particularly in his short stories, he uses a broad and persuasive tone to carry his reader along to the end of the piece. His prose acquires a more durable value by an evasion of the sordid, the commonplace, the merely factual and the statement-like by a subtle interplay of tone he has learnt to use as a professional writer. If it is such a language that is the staple basis of his dependence in translating verse he can even give his sentence an implicit rhythm, which he is capable of, even as he uses it to a different purpose in the prose that is created.

To understand his translation better, perhaps it will be more just to bring in a partial consideration of his verse. In Sanskrit, it is a suggestive sentence that has been called to be a unit of verse and, in a sense, the idea bears on his practice as a craftsman of prose and verse. When he chooses to write beyond the limitation of traditional forms, Rabindranath flattens the rhetoric of his verse:

Where words come out from the depth of truth:
. . .
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost
its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee
into ever-widening thought and action—
Into that heaven of freedom,
my Father,
let my country awake.

Here he uses the sheer value of a generalized poetic experience to poetic purposes. To reach the impersonal effect of a poem through the self-created rhetoric is an exercise of a poetic power at the other extreme of a self-involvement in experience typical of the subjectively romantic. It is through this that Rabindranath came to influence the technique of some of his contemporaries and even younger men in Europe and America. It is a technique close to that of Whitman and is at the same time neater and more controlled than Whitman could ever be.

It is such a technique in expression together with a rhetoric that seems to be in keeping with this kind of expression which seems to account for his translation of Kabir from Hindi.

As for the content of Kabir's poetry, although Rabindranath understood Shaktism in its essentials as such a tendency had become part of the tradition in Bengal, he was not a Shakta himself. Participation in life and activities that he stood for were not of that sort.

As it was, Kabir and his followers were averse to Shaktism as it meant allowing the senses to participate while trying to control and sublimate them, using partly the Yoga discipline to its end. Hindered by Buddhism in a full participation of the senses, the Shakta took to a fulfilment of such cravings by taking resort to more primitive archetypes of a compelling elemental sort in his effort to reassert vital participation. In this, he mixed the value of the 'mother' image toward a sublimation even from Buddhistic sources.

Coming from a fresh approach to the Upanishads in the wake of the new consciousness of the Brahmos, Rabindranath

is able to understand together the Shakta on the one hand and the Buddhist on the other.

It is in such a light that one should view his translation of such poems of Kabir in which there is a blend of an apprehensive of the real in one of the ways as the *Brihadaranyaka* understands it. Left to himself, Tagore can communicate such simple and naked states of the soul at their keenest in poetry. But trying to imitate a past mode in expression in such an apprehension of the real, he appears at times to be grappling with a derived influence and a somewhat outdated convention.

In Kabir, this urgency is often and unmistakably expressed in the figure of a beloved yearning for her lord:

> *Hai kōi āisa par upagahi Hari sauṅ kahai sunāi re*
> *ab tāu behal Kabīr bhaye hāin dekhen jiu jāi re*

Tagore's familiarity with such yearning for God as the infinite coming to him from several sources makes him naturally sympathetic to such an experience, and thus he is able to transmute the former adequately into English:

> My body and my mind are grieved for the want of Thee;
> O my Beloved! Come to my house.
> When people say I am thy Bride, I am ashamed; for I have not touched thy heart with my heart.
> Then what is this love of mine? I have no taste for food, I have no sleep; my heart is ever restless, within doors and without.
> As water is to the thirsty, so is the lover to the bride. Who is there that will carry my news to my Beloved?
> Kabir is restless: he is dying for sight of him.

A transmutation of the physical to the process of faith, which comes of a view of the Real is characteristic of the devotional literature of mediaeval India, and in Kabir such an experience finds a poet capable of expressing the same. A complete subservience of the self in faith to God is born of a feeling of humility of the loved one for the lover. This submission of the subject to God is the result of a high sense of priority in value

which is attested by the evidence of the humming, pulsating states of feeling of the sense in what they apprehend as truth in conceiving of such a likeness. The bare commonsense of the weaver, as he registers a view of human relation in the society around him, is used as a point of likeness for expressing a very different experience.

The complex wholeness of two separate experiences is grappled at some remove from the original, as it is couched in expression by a partly romantic poet, in the language of the cultivated, as in 'O my Beloved! Come to my house. . . 'etc. above.

That even the given relation between a lover and his bride is more than mere love of such a relation, *jyōn kāmin ko kāmini pyāri* is expressed with the help of what is basic to the relation itself. The nature of a desire for which a different kind of a feeling for physical love is the point of correlation between the subject and the object communicates the urgent and necessary character of the referent, *jyōn pyāse ko nīr re*. Tagore, however, simplifies such suggestions as he expresses the full line together in English, "As water to the thirsty, so is the lover to the bride."

Kabir finds it convenient to express his urgent cravings through the beloved symbol. His humility is unusual if one takes into account the manly vigour of his speech as well as its sharpness. That his humility comes in spite of his keen intellect and his full grasp of a vital speech in all its liveliness becomes possible because of a dramatization of the sensibility with that peculiar vantage that is his as a mystic. Whereas Tagore is happier at translating such a poem:

> Is there any wise man who will listen to that solemn music which arises in the sky?
> For He, the Source of all music, makes all vessels fraught and rests in fullness Himself.
> He who is in the body is ever athirst, for he pursues that which is in part.
> But ever there wells forth deeper and deeper the sound
> "He is this—this is He", fusing love and renunciation into one,

Kabir says: "O Brother! that is the Primal word".

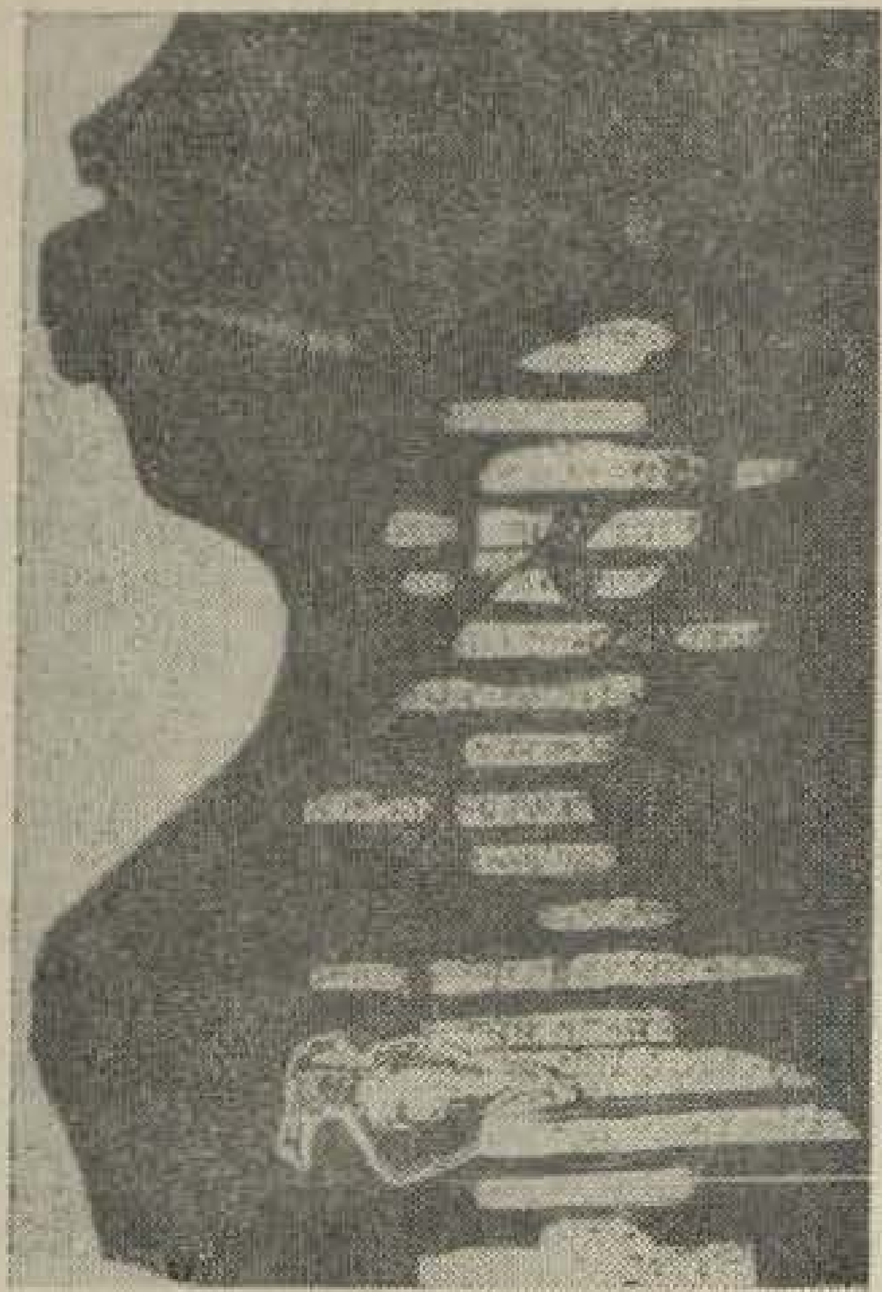
His translation of a more complex verse as:

Nāihar te jiyarā phāt re
Nāihar-nagarī jisakī bigarī, uskā kyā ghar bār re
tanik jiyarabā mōr na lāge, tan man bahut uchāt re
Yā nagāri men lakh darwājā, bīch samandar ghāt re
kaise ke pār utari hain sajanī, agam panth kā pāt re
Ajab tarah ka bana taṁbūra, tār lage man māt re
khūṇṭī ṭūṭī tār bilgāno, kōun pūchat bāt re
Hansi-hansi pūchāi māt pitā sāuṅ, bhōre sasur jawa re
jo chāhen so vāhī kariheṅ, patvāhī ke hāth re
Nhāya-dhōya dulhin hoya bāithī, johe piyā kī bāt re
tanik gūṅghatwā dikhaw sakhī ri, āj sōhhāg kī rāt re

becomes possible because of an undue simplification of some of the actual verse lines. Thus, "My heart cries aloud for the house of my love" is hardly the proper translation of, *Nāihar te jiyarā phāt re.* In his failure to translate the more localized element in Kabir's use of a native tongue, "*Nāihar-nagarī jisakī bigarī uskā kyā ghar bār re*", the translator uses a language that communicates a more consistent sense in relation to the intention of the poem at the close. But, in fact, it leads one away from the effect of the original. That *Nāihar-nagari* is not all right to the beloved figure in the poem means a deeper disturbance than Rabindranth's translation evokes:

My heart cries aloud for the house of my lover; the open road and the shelter of a roof are all one to her who has lost the city of her husband.

The ultimate sense of the poem is brought a little too soon in translation at the cost of the verse lines in the original. The confounding nature of an ecstasy that results of an experience of the variety and grandeur implicit in the infinite is expressed in terms of a place with a large number of gates. But it is still the feeling of most humane kind as it is made real in terms of how a beloved craves for entry into her lover's house.



From a Tagore Manuscript

Sometimes the poet achieves his objective correlative in terms of the familiar and the homely, *Hañsi-Hañsi pūchāi māt pitā sāuñ* which dramatizes what is essentially the indefinable nature of his ecstasy. In translating it in explicit terms, Tagore being a poet himself is perhaps conscious of the fact that such verse can only be translated in the manner he does it. The indefinable nature of the feeling involved in communicating ecstasy comes naturally to expression after such a dramatization of the basic content in the original text:

Hañsi hañsi pūchāi māt pitā sāuñ bhore sāsur jawa re
jo chāheñ so vāhī karihēñ, patvāhi ke hāth re
Nhāya-dhoya dulhin hoya bāithī, johe piyā kī bāt re

(which the translator thinks best to achieve in terms of direct speech) becomes possible through simple and direct presentation in another language:

I tell my parents with laughter that I must go to my Lord in the morning;

> They are angry, for they do not want me to go, and they say: "She thinks that she has gained such dominion over her husband that she can have whatever she wishes; and therefore she is impatient to go to him."

The rhetorical power that Tagore can build up for a sustenance of the personal and the general in experience in verse comes to help him in expressing that community sense basic to Kabir and his followers in a poem like:

Abadhū begam desa hamārā
rājā raṅg phakīr bādsā, sabse kahāuṅ pukārā
Jo tum chahō param pad kō, basihō desa hamara
jo tum āye jhīne hoke, taj do man kī dhārā
Aise rahan rahōre pyāre, sahajāi utār jāwō pārā
dharan akās gagan kachu nāhin, nahīn chandra nahīn tārā
Sant dharma kī hai mahatābe, sāheb ke darbārā
kahāi Kabīr sunō ho pyāre, sant-dharm hāi sārā

That Kabir also passes into a sect is possible because of the way in which he masters a common participation of the kind possible for others as well. In Rabindranath, with all his reformer's zeal, it becomes difficult to translate that sense of a live human participation together achieved in a poem that bases itself wholly on the power of a song to go by way of mouth. A literary craftsman like Rabindranath is up against an unusual mode in spite of his close familiarity with such ways of expression in the religious literature of Bengal. Thus, in spite of his unusual deftness in the use of the verse-craft, he can hardly recapture the full tone and effect of "*Abadhū begam desa hamara*", translating it as "Sadhu! My land is a sorrowless land."



What to read in Tagore?

From the *Gitanjali* published by the India Society in London in 1912 to William Radice's *Selected Poems* by the Penguins last year, there have been nearly a hundred translations of Tagore's works in print—of all denominations; good, bad and indifferent; some overfaithful, others equally free. Naturally, a lay non-Bengali reader will have a hard time to select the right ones from out of this veritable jungle. Here is a select guide, drawn up in consultation with scholars who matter. The selection has been made keeping in view the importance of the original work, its historical significance and the quality of the translation.—*Ed.*

POEMS, SONGS AND EPIGRAMS

1. *Gitanjali* (*Song Offerings*)
   from *Gitanjali, Naivedya, Kheya, Gitimalya*, etc.)
   Tr. Author
   The India Society, London, 1912.
2. *The Gardener*
   from *Kshanika, Kalpana, Sonar Tari*, etc.)
   Tr. Author
   Macmillan & Co., London, 1913.
3. *The Crescent Moon*
   from *Sisu*
   Tr. Author
   Macmillan & Co., London, 1913.
4. *Lover's Gift and Crossing*
   from *Balaka, Kshanika, Kheya*,etc.
   Macmillan & Co., London, 1918.

5. *The Fugitive*
   Santiniketan Press,
   Santiniketan,
   1919.
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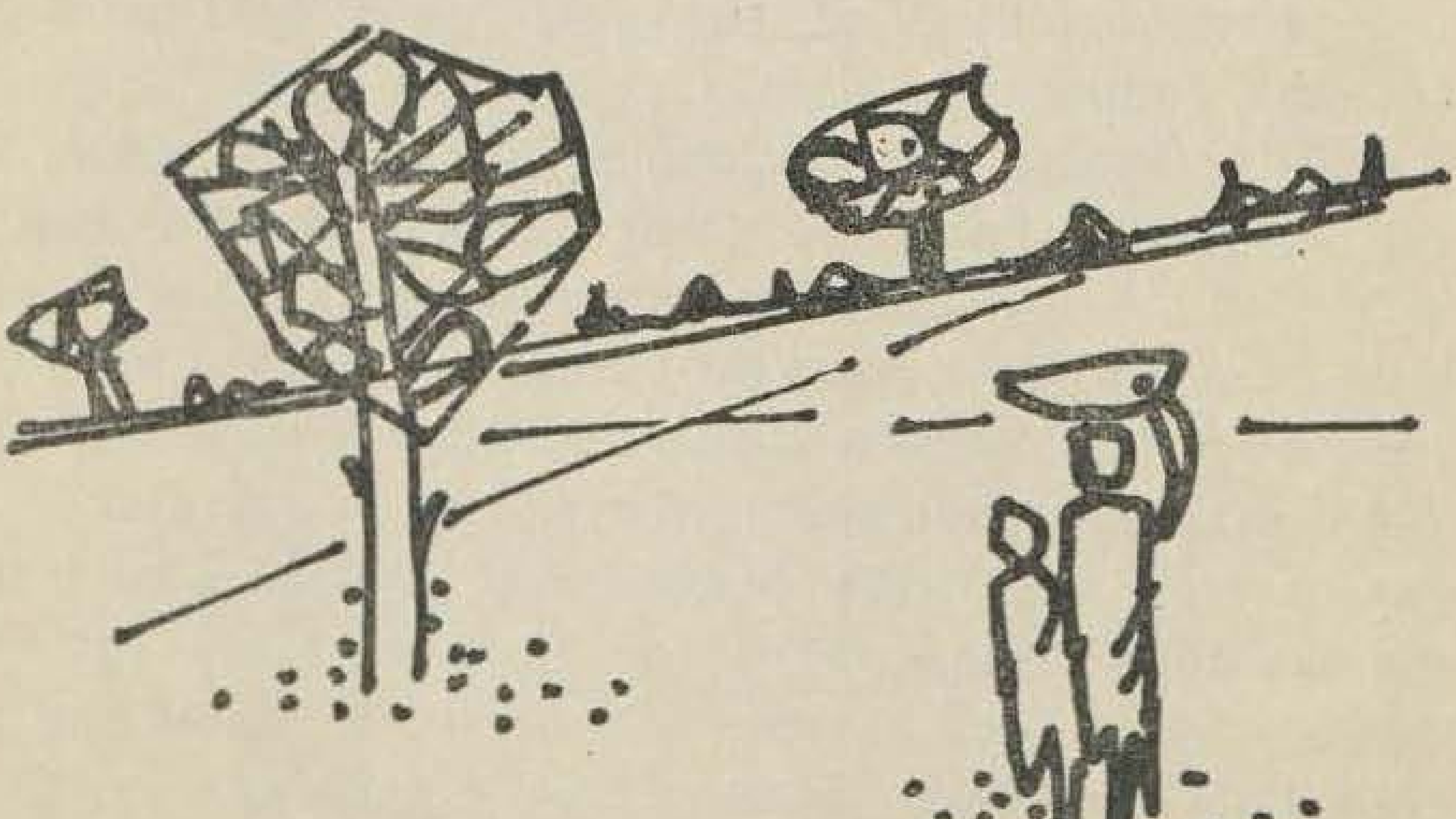
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Short Stories



The Disease

ASGHAR WAJAHAT

AS always, his face shimmered or glistened or sparkled. He had it, what you call robust moral force or courage on a man's face. He always has it, as much as anyone can have. And it shows. Rather, it proclaims itself loud and clear. The best way to put it will be: he oozes it. He has just dropped in. Whenever he comes, it's writ large on his face: See, I came to your house. In case you sniffed it, you have another reading on his face: So what, anything goes between friends.

You don't have such a thing as a drawing room in a middle-class Delhi home, have you? So it will be more correct to say that he came and sat on a chair in a room. Then he spread himself full. Then he asked for tea, casually. He is a neighbour, after all. Delhi's neighbour, mind you; a mere five kilometre road stretches between our homes.

Until tea came and even after tea came Vermaji kept tugging at political rumours which he would in no case call rumours but news. Truth is, a bit of pedantry permitted, that Vermaji is a specialist, not of pure but applied politics—a *cognoscente.* What's up? Which minister is in what shape? Who cut out whom and how? Who had it cut out at how much? Who's hobnobbing with whom? Who's in the good books? What are the new alignments? Who told the Prime Minister what? Who from Rajput lobby is after the Brahmin lobby? What tremors

are expected in the State politics? Who is currently looking after the money-bag? Who's whose agent? Who can get things done and where? These and similar bits of information are neither a part of Vermaji's profession, nor do they bring him any gifts. Call it an addiction, a hobby, an extra interest that compels Vermaji to reach for the tinkle once in a while, "It's real interesting, *yaar*. . . so and so, you know, is out. . . out from the secretariat. . . . yes, you will have more to hear on it. . . . not on telephone. . . and our man 'he' is in. . ."

Not that 'he' is by any means close to Vermaji. But since 'he' is in, Vermaji would like you to believe that 'he' is the one closer to his heart. The fact, however, is that these transfers and appointments hardly add a nickel to his purse or a notch to his social standing.

And yet, Vermaji was not an uninteresting man, certainly not for a man who has this kink of weaving yarns.

"So, Vermaji, what's on?" These are the words that make me itchy, whenever we settle down for a chat. They come gushing out of me, irrepressible, in Vermaji's company. In other words, you don't have to beat about the bush to flatter the secret out of him, to tune him in, to goad him on to a new subject or to lead him back to an old one. Often a query here or a hint there would be enough to add fuel to the fire of Vermaji's tongue.

'Dilli' is the metropolis really. Vermaji is a citizen of this very 'Dilli' city. Things are kind of okay for him. Ambitions are limitless. Public credibility is good. Gurus and godmen, poets and writers, doctors and healing agents, clerks, peons, IAS officers and Minister's PAs—that is, wherever a man can have connections, he has. And this makes him feel secure as well.

I take no chances with Vermaji either but keep him in good humour as best as I can. Anything can happen in this goddam city. And then you discover the meaning of a stitch in time—the meaning of someone's friendship, someone's reference, someone's introduction, being close to someone, being someone's man—someone who is counted as a man on top. For example,

you have been injured but you can't get proper treatment in a government hospital unless something happens from 'above'. Obviously enough, one at the top can be reached only by a ladder. So, in a manner of speaking, Vermaji was a ladder to me. I do not know if I was anything to him. Sure I must be something. And, why, something may be quite something. In times of necessity a chit from even poets, writers and teachers can have its own value in pushing things up. In other words, even the junk has its use or, as they say, even a counterfeit coin can come to rescue at times. Not that we had any illusion about each other, nor that we were intimate friends and believed in each other. Oh no, that kind of thing was out for us.

Vermaji sipped at tea. The chat was on. It was the time in Delhi when meningitis, children's dread disease, was raging all around. Radio, TV and daily papers monitored the number of dead day after day. There was horror in the air. Schools were a veritable confusion. It was difficult to know which child had this contagious disease and when he might pass it on. The headmasters of the schools were sending frantic letters asking parents to hold back their wards if they had meningitis.

Talk of hospitals! As many as three, sometimes even four, children piled up in a single bed. They lie in verandas, lobbies, everywhere. It has been rightly said that our mills are getting 'sick' and our hospitals have turned into mills—shop-floors for open bargains. Long queues. Boring waits. And doctors behaving not just rudely but insultingly. A cold indifference is the order of the day. No one knows nothing. In short, the situation in hospitals is something akin to the day of the deluge—each to himself, turning a blind eye to everything and everyone. Nobody is friend or companion, no relative, no samaritan.

Who would not be afraid of a situation like this! And here was Vermaji expounding on this very disease. His two sons were also in the vulnerable bracket, between five to eight years of age. Further on, Vermaji disclosed that meningitis vaccines were being imported from abroad. Very little in quantity, so little that the government hospitals got it straight from the health ministry.

And no sooner it came than it disappeared. Everyday, the people, not in hundreds but in thousands, stand in queue with children in tow. Pandemonium prevails, they call each other names, they engage themselves in fisticuffs, and sometimes even lathi-charge is made. In the end, they go back empty-handed because all vaccines are passed on to VIP quota. If you have strings, you get it. If you don't have it, you don't have it.

Vermaji described everything in meticulous detail. Fear gripped us. The elder son stood pale and silent. The wife was inconsolable. I puffed at my cigarette. Seeing all of us numb and listless, Vermaji too cast his eyes down. Forget the world, our foremost anxiety at the moment was somehow to prevent meningitis striking our children. Vermaji waited on until we were at breaking point and then said, "If you want vaccines, it can be arranged for your children."

"How?"

"You leave it to me. . . Come on, *yaar*, if it comes to that I will press ministerial sources for you."

We sat there under the weight of his obligation.

"But how?"

"Now, do you want to eat mangoes or count the leaves?" he smiled and added, "If you want I can get your children vaccinated right here."

You could have seen us then, the two of us, husband and wife, gasping for words to express our gratitude. It seemed Vermaji was our god, our prophet, our saviour. . . . the highest one can think of. Inwardly I cursed myself for having failed all along to pay due respect to a man of such value and usefulness. I could at least have called him for booze once in a few months or invited him to dinner with his family. But careful, if I did it now he would think I was doing it in exchange. Let the kids get vaccinated, I resolved, and then call him I must for booze even if it meant throwing fifty to hundred rupees down the drain. And why throwing it down the drain? Do some arithmetic. Three children vaccinated at the rate of rupees five hundred each by a private doctor would mean a thousand and five

hundred rupees and here was Vermaji getting it done for us—free.

Meantime, another round of tea came in an instant. Vermaji never objects to tea. This we know. Enthused afresh after tea, Vermaji said, "It's like this, *yaar*. . . you know Monu. . . Mohini, my elder brother's daughter. She is a doctor at the hospital and she has pinched boxes of it from there. I will bring her on my scooter straight in here."

"*Yaar*, Vermaji. . . " I started whining.

"Come off it, *yaar*. . . Monu has hundreds of doses. One thing, though. . . consult your family doctor first." This bit of advice we liked even better. We talked to the family doctor the next day and he said that it was not so necessary because there was no guarantee, and meningitis can attack even after vaccination. If a child has already had it, then it becomes necessary for other children of the family. When the doctor told us this, we thought why go for it and decided against vaccination.

Around eleven in the morning the next day we were having tea in the office and were busy gossiping. After others had left, suddenly there appeared Tiwari, his face pulled down. The old peon of the office, this Tiwari. I get along well with him, had to. Times are such that if you don't have personal bonds with people, not a file would move from here to there. And these peons and drivers—they are a thousand times better off than us. They own houses. They do long hours of overtime and take wads of money home. No income tax, no cuts and deductions. Public sector is a game for one either up above or down below. The middlings are the shehnai players of the trade. As regards the shehnai player, thereby hangs a tale. A shehnai player is he who has to take the beating either way, in rain or shine alike. The story goes that once some musicians were playing in a king's court. The king liked their music. Pleased, the king ordered that the instruments of the musicians be filled with gold. The tabla player stuffed his tabla with gold, as did the sitar player, the tanpura player, the harmonium player. . . .That is to say, it was a field-day for all except the shehnai player.

For how many gold coins could be pushed into a shehnai, a stick of an instrument? So, he remained in loss. Somedays later, these musicians were again playing in the court, but the king was in a foul mood, angry with god-knows-what. He ordered the instruments shoved into their respective. . . Others escaped, thanks to their bulky instruments, but shehnai player could not. So this is the story of the hapless shehnai player. The reality is that we middlings are the shehnai players of the day.

To come back to Tiwari. He came and looked in a miserable shape. I asked him what was the matter and he said that one of his sons was down with meningitis. He was under treatment but the doctor said that other children of the family would have to be vaccinated. In the open market the doctors were charging rupees five hundred for a vaccine.

I said, "Suppose I get it done free for you, Tiwari?"

"Saheb, I will be obliged for life."

"Come off this obligation bogey, now tell me when do you want it done."

"Whenever you say."

"Fine, I will tell you tomorrow. It will be done by day after."

Surprised, incredulous and courtseying solemnly, he dragged himself out of the cabin. I rang up Vermaji at his office. He was there. I told him the whole story. He listened and said, "I will have to talk to Monu first, *yaar*. It will be done. I don't see any difficulty."

"*Yaar*, see it's done somehow."

"Yes, yes, there doesn't seem to be any problem." We held the line longer for a few moments talking aimlessly, and it was over.

I rang up Vermaji again the next day. He was there. "How are things," he asked warmly. When it came down to meningitis vaccine, he said "Yes, I talked to Monu. She was not home and I went all the way to her hospital. Now. . . *yaar*. . . " I heard his voice sinking, overtaken by helplessness. I knew Tiwari will have to fend for himself, poor chap. "It's like this, *yaar*. I

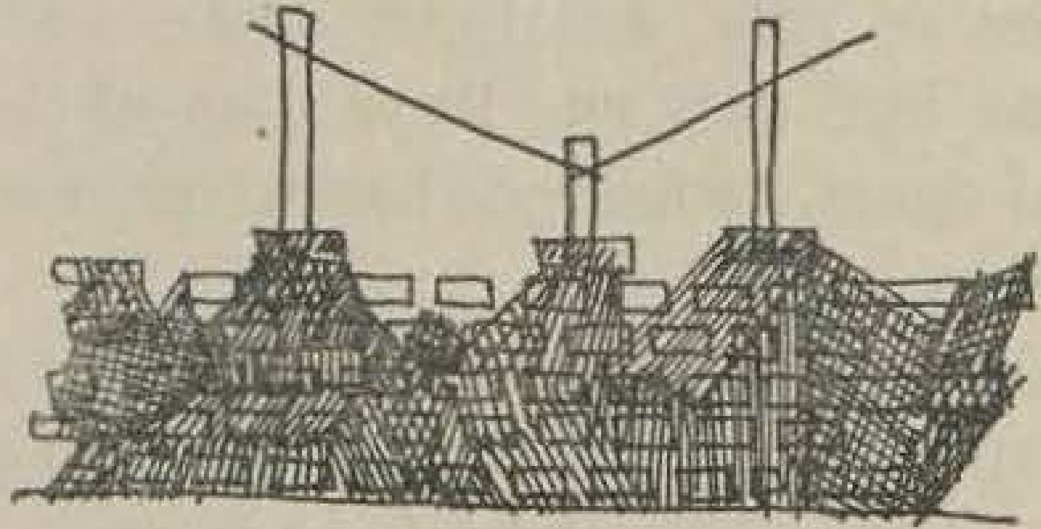
talked to Monu and she said it was a different matter if it were bhaisaheb's, that is your, children, but. . .*yaar*. . ."

"Forget it. I will tell Tiwari," I said. I found a hundred questions rumbling in my mind. Then I told Vermaji, "So, when are you coming for dinner."

"Hey. . .Hey. . .Hey. . .", he chortled, "Whenever you say." Suddenly, I was ashamed of myself. Angry. "Tomorrow evening," I said, and hung up without bothering to know what he said. I knew his reply.

'Bimari'

Tr. from Hindi by RATNADHAR JHA



The Game

BHAGABATI CHARAN PANIGRAHI

GHINUA was reputed in that region as a shikari. He did not know how to make use of a gun. His chief weapon was a handmade bow and arrow. While shooting, he would lie supine on the ground. With the left foot on the bow, drawing the arrow up to the ear he would release it. Thus he could hit his target even one mile away. By means of the bow and arrow, he had killed any number of deer, antelopes, boars and bears. Also countless leopards, but only two Royal Bengal tigers. For killing Royal Bengal tigers, he had got handsome rewards from the Deputy Commissioner.

Early that morning, he arrived at the Deputy Commissioner's bunglow with a strange game. His bow was dangling from one shoulder. The hatchet was on the other and two or three arrows he held in his hand. Seeing Ghinua in this appearance, the orderly enquired: "Hey, what sort of game have you got today?"

The orderly was intimate with Ghinua. Often, he had his share in Ghinua's baksheesh. In response to the orderly's question, Ghinua bared the pair of his unclean jaws. One cannot say whether he grinned or jeered. What is properly called a grin, no one had ever seen it on Ghinua's face. He used to bare his teeth thus occasionally; it was neither a grin, nor a grimace, but merely a display of teeth.

The orderly repeated, "Hey, you fellow, what game have

you brought today?"

Indicating something tied up in his cloth, Ghinua gestured that he had brought a big game that day.

The orderly asked, "Tiger?"

Nodding, Ghinua signified dissent.

"Then, is it leopard? Bear? Boar?"

Ghinua simply nodded.

"Then, what's it, you rascal?"

Hearing the noise, the saheb came out of the bunglow. Paying obeisance to the saheb, Ghinua again bared his teeth. When the saheb expressed his eagerness to see the game, Ghinua took out of the cloth-bundle a freshly-cut human head and placed it at the saheb's feet.

Flabbergasted, the saheb retreated by two or three steps. Reaching out his hand, Ghinua begged, "Saheb, baksheesh!" After sometime, holding himself in check, the saheb hinted to Ghinua to wait. He went inside and rang up the armed police. Save this, there was no other way to restrain Ghinua. Besides the bow and arrow and the hatchet, Ghinua had giant strength!

When Ghinua, his wrists and ankles fettered, was taken into police custody, he could not make anything out of it. What is the idea of confining him like this? As opportunity arose, he enquired from people around. Some said he would be put to the gallows, others said he would be deported beyond the seas. What grave offence had he committed? As he had no idea of it, he did not give much credence to their words. At last, one day, the Deputy Commissioner visited the jail. He asked him all about the matter. The Deputy Commissioner said that as he used to kill tigers, bears, etc. he was rewarded at once previously. Now he had killed a man! He would be rewarded this time also, but it would be decided after careful consideration by a team of five people. Ghinua accepted this version as good enough!

The day his trial began, Ghinua thought to himself that he would be rewarded that day. Feeling encouraged, he made a detailed statement to the judge: "That it was no small trouble for him to dispatch Gobind Sardar that day. A lot of men were

lying in wait to kill him, but none could make it. Sardar always went about in his car! He had acquired all his property by looting others and he was a devil. How many had he killed, how many had he ruined and how many women had he raped! There was no end to it. Similarly, he had appropriated Ghinua's landed property also. That evening Sardar had planned to commit rape on Ghinua's wife. What insolence! But seeing Ghinua there, he had driven away. He thought he would give him the slip. But, shooting an arrow at the car's wheel, Ghinua made it immobile. Then, chopping off Sardar's head with the hatchet, Ghinua ran the whole night through the forest. Running thirty miles in one breath he had reached the Deputy Commissioner's bunglow.

"Gobind Sardar was no ordinary person. He always carried a gun. People were scared of him much more than they were of tigers and bears. He did more harm to the people than tigers and bears. To finish him, he had to use not a little courage and intelligence.

"A few years back, the saheb had rewarded Dora with five hundred rupees for chopping off the head of Jhapat Singh who was a rebel. Jhapat Singh, in a way, was a good sort. Never did he commit rape on women, nor usurped others' property. He only looted the treasury. And killed a few constables. Gobind Sardar, on the other hand, was a terrible fellow. For killing him, Ghinua should receive a bigger reward."

Everybody exploded into laughter at Ghinua's claim. Laughing, the judge said, "Yes, suitable baksheesh would be given!" The government counsel said, "The sole purpose of bringing you here was to give you baksheesh!"

Without seeing any joke in it, Ghinua believed it as true, for he had no sense of humour. By nature, he was emotionless.

At last, he was sentenced to death. Ghinua could make neither head nor tail of it. While being taken back to the jail, he was given to understand that the day for the gifting of his baksheesh was approaching.

Ghinua did not understand till then that he was a criminal

and was, therefore, awarded the death penalty. How could he uuderstand that to kill Jhapat Singh and Gobind Sardar were not the same? It was beyond him that one was honourable and the other a crime. How could his head penetrate the niceties of law! He was a mere savage santal!

Ghinua tells himself: For killing Jhapat Singh, Dora had got a reward of five hundred rupees. Why should he accept anything less? Refusing the reward, he would say, "Rather, don't pay anything, saheb. I am entitled to get more than Dora."

In the dark solitary cell of the prison, he thinks a great deal. He does not find anybody to talk to; nor is he inclined to talk. Only, he was restless to get back home after receiving the reward.

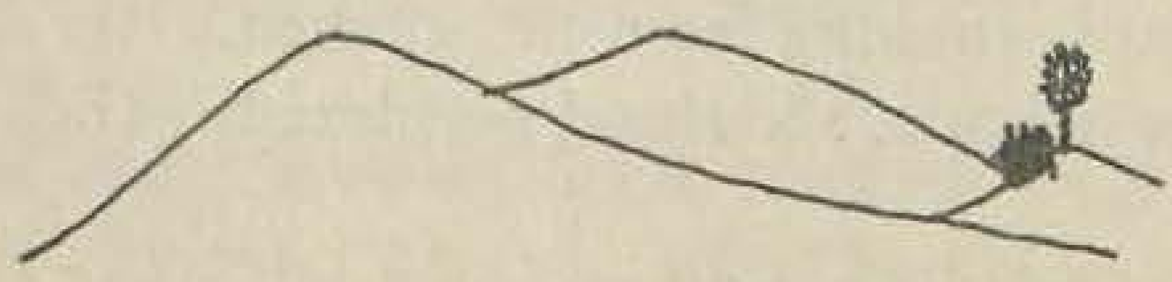
In the end, the day of his hanging came. He was asked his last desire. He said, "My baksheesh".

"Right! Come along for your baksheesh"—saying thus, they took him away. A hood made of black cloth was put on his head. Blindfold, Ghinua thought for himself that gold and silver would be showered on his hands. Government has its own various devices, gimmicks, formalities, procedures. Is baksheesh paid without some such formality? Coming back home, he would show it to his wife! How happy would she be! He would build a fine house, take to farming. He would live happily. Gobind Sardar was no more there to plunder!

Suddenly, something hit his neck.

'Shikar'

Tr. from Oriya by ASHOK KUMAR DAS



The Embryo

POOMANI

AS I TRIED to control the wave of nausea that churned up my entrails, my dizziness increased. Sometimes I covered my mouth with the end of my saree and tried to suppress it, but could not.

On the dusty road, the terribly hot sun made my head reel. My eyes grew tired. A weariness came over my body. Tears dried on my face. I felt a sense of hunger. Also a disgust to eat. I wanted to rest my head in the shade of a tree.

There was not a spot on the road I didn't spit on. Why the hell did I salivate in such profusion?

Mother walked ahead of me without looking back. I was afraid to call her.

Yesterday it was not like this. I felt my body taut and dull. Every month it was like this. Sometimes I had delayed periods. I took this to be one such. But it had landed me here. In the morning I couldn't raise my head from where I was lying. Everything seemed topsy-turvy. Saliva collected in my mouth and there came a rumbling sound from inside. It seemed I would throw my very entrails out.

Mother came running from the kitchen. Her face registered a shock. For a while, she stood perplexed. Then she began to beat me.

With the back of a broom, she beat me all over my body,

beat me madly till rashes appeared on my back. As I kept vommitting into the drain, blows fell on my nape. She seized me by the hair and kicked me. Weeping, she scolded me. Her voice did not reach beyond the house, but within it was wild, severe. I couldn't cry loud enough to drown that voice. Even though I controlled crying, I hiccupped and that made me vomit again.

All these four years, since I came of age, mother had not behaved like this. Now her eyes bulged out. Where did she keep her rage all these days?

Even if elder sister were here, it is doubtful if she would have pulled mother aside. She had gone to fetch water. When sister came in, mother too was sitting in a corner and crying.

Father was not in the house all this time. Had he been present, things would have taken a different turn. That drooping moustache and protruding eyes. . . yes, he would have killed me with one kick. Till today, I haven't looked him straight in the face. There was no male child in the family. So he would call both of us sisters with a '*lei*', treating us as boys. We would answer him, lowering our heads. That was all.

That day even when sister came home with her child he didn't talk to her much.

"Did you leave in a huff or what?" That was all he asked. Sister mumbled the word 'chain' or some such thing.

"Oh, is that the matter? Stay here sharing our *kanji*. When I'm able to give you a chain, you can go back to his house."

Four or five months had passed. He had not spoken about it again. Mother, too.

Lucky, father was not in the house at that time. Mother asked me to get up before he came home. She plaited my hair. Then she asked me to wash my face. She also washed hers. Gave me a bowl of fermented *kanji*. Asked me to go upstairs and lie down there.

Father came home from the fields, took his food and started to leave again in a hurry. Mother asked him casually, "Where

are you off to? When will you return?" Then she went to the next street borrowed five rupees from someone, came back and woke me up. Till we got down the steps, sister did not ask us any questions.

"Keep an eye on the house. I shall take her to Vadakoor and return soon. She has gone and done things unbecoming of her, the silly girl. To whom can I tell this? If father comes to know of it, he would hang her from the roof of the house. I don't know whether the native midwife will be at home now or not."

Mother walked briskly. Sister didn't utter a word. The child on her hips kept jumping.

Mother did not open her mouth till we had reached the village common. When we passed the village-well she began grumbling.

In the glowing sun, the chatter of the boys could be heard indistinctly from the village. Near the ruins of a dilapidated house stood someone with a baby on her hips. It must be the sister.

Smoke billowed from the sugar-mill near the tank on the east where sugarcane was being crushed. Its acrid smell assaulted our nostrils for a long distance.

The washerwoman who was coming from the opposite side with her saree covering her head asked, "Where are you going in this burning sun?"

Mother did not stop to look at her but said, "Nothing special. We go as far as Vadakoor to get some grain for our *kanji*. She is giving me company. You've no worries, your *kanji*-pot is an ocean."

The washerwoman who passed mother said in a low voice, "See, what she says, Our *kanji*-pot is an ocean!"

She took a few steps, looked backed at us and walked on.

My tongue was dry and the lips twitched. I had a thirst such as my inside was parched. Mother walked ahead without looking back. If only I could call her and talk to her.

Mother untied her saree, tucked the end of it round her waist, puckered her face, and waited for me at the brook.

"What, girl, why this languid walk? Can't you quicken your pace? Will you be struck with cholera if you did?"

Even then I felt thirsty.

Mother was quite near. Her face did not show the emotions that passed through her mind. I couldn't approach her.

"You shameless creature. Tell me, who is the fellow?"

I couldn't open my mouth.

Mother bit her lips. The betel-stained lips closed tight. She fixed an unwavering stare at me.

"Come out with it. Damn you."

"The man in the sugar-mill."

"That man from outside? How long ago?"

"That day when I went to the sugarcane field to cut grass for the cattle."

"Was it only once? You were going there every day, you silly wretch. If only you had some fear in your heart would you have gone for that fellow? Is he the dust of the black cotton soil that sticks to the feet or the dust of the red earth that sticks to the saree? He had the temerity, because he has money. His father has bought over all the fields of the villagers cheating them. Why wouldn't he do it! He should go and drag his older or younger sister instead. Come what may, I shall deal with him after we come back. What sort of infatuation have you for that fellow?"

"It was he. . ."

"What did you say? If the woman doesn't smile back would a man ever dare approach her? It is all because of the fat in your flesh. What if your body is shreded and thrown to the dogs, how does it bother him, a male? He would enter any slushy mire, wash his arse in any water he sees and walk off. Think of us. My brains should be shoed!"

Mother moved on, fisting me on the head from behind. After climbing the ascent she went on grumbling against father as if he were before her: "I told you even then. Did you listen to me? If only she had been married to someone at the proper time. Why all this? The daughter should be given plenty of

jewels. Else you would fall in the estimation of the people. Should a father talk like this? You strut about to settle the village disputes with the staff in your hand. Now what are you going to say. If people come to know of this, the whole village would hawk at you and spit on you. With what face will you go out and twirl your moustache?

"You didn't agree even when I suggested that this girl could be given ornaments, melting my *pampadam* and given in marriage. What have you let me do in life? We gave the elder daughter to a fairly rich family as you wished. And now she has come back and lies there as one who didn't have a happy married life with her husband. If she had not had a child we could have obtained a divorce and married her off to someone else. One should cut one's coat according to the cloth. Who would dare speak to you!

"Do we have wealth in abundance in the house? Are you able tor un the house with your earnings as the village watchman, Iask you. I don'tk nowr eally. Witht wo milch cows I am somehow managing. Even to have mere *kanji* we find it difficult. In such a state, now this girl. What am I to do? I am a sinner."

Mother blew her nose.

To the east of the track were two heaps of gravel close to each other. Water was not being baled out from any of the wells.

I was still sick. A dry tongue, irritation in the throat, a cramp in the stomach.

"I am thirsty, mother. And feel giddy."

After I said it, my fear increased.

"Will you die if you're thirsty. There, go to the well, drink and come back. Else fall into it and die."

I thought that even if I went to the well would I have the strength to get down the steps. Perhaps, after I got down inside. . .

Mother sat in the bushes holding her knees tight.

Pain splintered my lower abdomen. Thighs were weary and aching. The calf muscles twitched.

Had I known it would come to this, I wouldn't have been

so careless. When the owner of the sugar-mill gave me the sugarcane juice and cast that sly smile, I ought to have thrown the juice on his face. He did all sorts of things.

I went my way. It was he who called me and voluntarily talked to me. If one cuts grass in the garden one should pay the price for it, he said. It was a mistake I ever talked to him.

One day he gave me a brassiere and cloth for blouse. When I shoved them in the grass-basket, many women were cutting sugarcane. I passed them, came home, went to the backroom and wore the brassiere without making the least noise. It looked nice. I couldn't wear it and go out. So I tied it along with the saree bought on the last Pongal day and kept it in the bundle hanging on the clothesline. Mother did not know of it.

But soon after, this has happened. If Subbulakshmi came to know of this, she would tomtom it to the whole village. The girls in the match-factory would look down upon me. Subbulakshmi got married, gave birth to a male child. And she was proud of it. Even when she saw me she would not talk to me. Husband and wife, wherever they went, would be together.

Mother stared at me.

"Why do you stand like a big hull? If you want, go and drink water and come back. Why pester me?"

"I don't want to drink water."

"Then why complain? Walk ahead."

I didn't have the energy to walk past mother.

"Walk on, girl. Is your flesh paining. Make way for me. Let me go. . . Don't know what the midwife would say. Would she give you medicine or plug a stick. That's another problem. When we go home you've to lie unseen for three days and I've to guard you as if you were a corpse, as if I had no other work to do. What am I to say to your father? If he learns about this, none of us can live in the house. And that fellow cannot gallivant, sure of his life. This girl too would be no more our daughter. Without any reason the whole family would be ruined. It is I who am to give that fellow what he deserves. When I go out to cut grass I should wear a pair of good chappals. Be there,

you fellow, I am coming to knock out your teeth.

"What would become of this girl's body. If all the tissues of the foetus not fully grown were expelled easily, well and good. If some of them remained unexpelled, what to do? This ass of a girl would be disfigured and become useless. Isn't she the one to marry and go and live in another house?"

Twice or thrice, mother turned back and looked at me.

Mother had not beaten me at any time before. If father scolded me, she would fight with him, too. Her nature is an especial one. When she had roasted gram for making curry, she would keep some tied in a knot in her saree-end and give them to me to eat. Sometimes she would bring me titbits from the bazaar. She would oil my hair, tie it into a bun. She would delouse me and remove the itching. She would take away the nits with a nit-remover. Always I was her 'Littl'un'.

Mother's heart had broken to pieces. Sister's presence in the house was itself a great burden on her. Often she would grumble to father. Father would say, "A fat lot you know. Keep quiet" and walk out. Sister would suckle her child and sniffle.

Irritation in the eyes. The heat of the sun had not abated, The fleecy clouds drifted across the sky.

Mother tucked tight the fringe of her saree into the waist-band and said, "Come, you silly, be quick. Before father returns home, we've to be back."

Across the dust-filled brook we walked, sands scorching our feet and scrambled up the bank. Then Vadakoor was in full view.

'Karu'

Tr. from Tamil by M.S. RAMASWAMI

Full Circle

SALAAM BIN RAZAQ

IN THE EVENING, when returning home from the office I could not imagine that there was trouble in the offing, that I would be up against such heavy odds as would shatter me completely. If I wanted to, I could have easily averted the crisis. But a man cannot have his way in everything. There are certain things far beyond a man's reach which he cannot mould according to his sweet will. Maybe it is such unpredictable things that are given the appelation of accident. However, to cut the matter short, I found myself in the stranglehold of circumstances and I could see no way of extricating myself from this dire situation.

I was late from office and in my hurry to reach home, I was walking fast, taking long strides. I was thinking of my wife. Poor soul, she must be really worried. Her face glued to the window bars, she must be anxiously scanning the lane, giving a start at the slightest sound.

The evening shadows had descended upon the lane and as I entered it, the familiar environment engulfed me from all sides. Acrid smoke billowing from tin-roofed hovels, stench wafting from open drains criss-crossing the locality, half-clad children running about, making ear-splitting noise. And there were hordes of puppies, hens and ducks. One could even hear a barrage of filthy abuses in shrill feminine voices, emanating from one or two hovels. Perhaps these women were fulminating

against their children; or, though aimed at their children, these abuses were actually meant for the neighbours' ears.

As I approached my hovel I saw one of Shamu Dada's young lackeys hiding some bottles of hooch under the drain running by the side of my hovel. Caught unawares, he gave me a bewildered look and then recovering quickly, smiled. The smell of country liquor assailed my nostrils.

"What are you doing here?" I asked him in a sharp voice.

"Nothing," he said, giving me a complacent smile. "I'm just hiding these bottles here. Dada's orders!"

Till now the dirt was confined to the lane but now it had invaded my very door. It was a challenge to any decent well-meaning man. How could I take this new situation lying down.

"Take away the bottles from here!" I said in a gruff voice. "This gutter is not meant to hide your bottles."

The boy gave me a belligerent look. "I know nothing about it," he said. "This is what Dada has asked me to do. I must hide them here."

"Dada or no Dada, take away the bottles and be gone!"

Muttering under his breath, the boy put the bottles back in his soiled bag and walked away. Then he looked back. "Saab, don't try to be too clever," he said by way of a parting shot. "It may cost you dearly. Don't forget, it's Nehru Nagar."

I held my peace. There was no point in falling foul of that lout. Lucky for me that he had left without creating trouble. I proceeded towards my hovel. I saw from the corners of my eyes that my altercation with the boy had brought inquisitive women to their doors. Their eyes followed me with curiosity, but I refused to take any notice of them. My wife, who had already heard me, was standing at the door.

"What happened? Who was he?" she asked me, anxiety writ large on her face. I disappeared into my room. My wife carefully closed the door behind me.

"Oh, these wretches! They are just not concerned with others' difficulties or self-respect," I muttered unlacing my shoes.

"But what happened?" my wife asked in a tremulous voice,

charged with worry.

"That Shamu Dada's boy wanted to hide some bottles of liquor under the drain in front of our door and I didn't let him have his way."

My wife was silent for a while. "I've been telling you all the time to look for a new place," she said at last. "For God's sake set about it in right earnest. This morning the Aunt living in hovel no. 6 fell out with me at the tap."

"What was the rumpus about?" I asked unbuttoning my bush shirt.

"What about? There was no reason for it. These people are all the time trying to invent excuses to quarrel with you. As you know each one is entitled to three pots of water and one must stand in line for his turn. I had filled only two pots but still she objected, saying that ours was a small family. I told her that each family was entitled to three pots and I would take three. Why should I take two? At this she started squabbling with me."

I lay down on the cot, my mind in a quandary. I was in no position to change my hovel for the next four or five months and it was getting difficult to pass every single day in this locality. I had been here only three months and my wife found the place so uncongenial that every night she brought up the subject on the sly. I would put her off—sometimes by sweet reasonableness and at others by being gruff, specially when I lost my patience. Not that she was not aware of my financial position. But like every good housewife, she could not help nurturing the desire of setting up a nice house of her own. This desire would become intense whenever there was a brawl in the lane – and such brawls were taking place almost every day. Starting with arguments they often ended in bloodshed. Particularly on Sundays, there was an appreciable increase in the number of such clashes. As for the other six days, it was the women who held the stage. Standing in the queues for water or for their turn at the public toilet these women would fall out among themselves. They even went for each other's hair, pulling at them with savage delight.

But generally these squabbles did not go beyond exchanging qro-fanities or scratching the adversary's skin with nails. But Sunday was the day of reckoning for all sorts of disputes, big and small, which had piled up during the course of the week. This also happened to be the day when these women's husbands, sons or relatives had their day off from the mill or the workshop and they put it to good use in settling scores.

In addition, Shanker Patil's *matka* business also remained closed on Sundays. But what people lost on the rounds they more than made up on the swings. On that day Shamu Dada's *adda* hummed with activity from the very early hours of the morning. The revellers would make a bee-line to Shamu Dada's *adda* and would be seen swaggering up and down the lane after downing the hooch. They would utter obscenities and laugh uproariously. Week-long reports of complaints on which they were fed by their women would spill over into brawls, sometimes ending in pitched battles when many heads were broken and many more rowdies were snapped by the police. . . This was the normal Sunday-pattern.

I was myself deeply worried over the whole situation. But worry cannot provide a solution to any problem. My wife would not realize how difficult it was for me, a mere clerk with limited means to find a neat and clean house in a good locality. A village woman, torn from her rural environments, it was her first experience of living in a city.

My wife came with a cup of tea. Placing it on the teapoy by my side, she wiped her face with the *pallav* of her sari and sat down by my side.

"Won't you have your tea?" she asked, seeing me lost in thought.

I picked up the cup of tea.

She said," "Zulekha, who lives in hovel no. 3, came to me yesterday and asked me for a loan of *atta*. I put her off, saying that I had to get my wheat ground. She went away without a word but since then whenever she finds me standing in the queue before the public toilet or the public tap she curls up her nose

or makes a face at me. She even spits in my direction. The bitch!"

My wife's face contorted in anger and I could not take my eyes off her face.

"You should have given her some *atta*," I said taking a sip of tea.

"Why?" she said in a sharp voice. "You don't know these people. Friends or foes, one should keep them at arm's length. Yon don't realize that this give-and-take is at the root of all trouble in this locality." My wife said this in a mysterious voice, as if she was letting me into a great secret.

I listened to her in silence.

"Today you have been very late from office," she continued "For heaven's sake, don't come so late in future. I feel so miserable till you come. In this lane, there is a brawl every second minute. Before you came, Rabo and Sakeena were flying at each other's throat."

"Why?"

"There was nothing the matter. Sakeena's child had thrown a stone at Rabo's duck. This was a good enough reason for them to let off steam. Oh, how they abused each other. They would have gone on and on but for Sukho Tai who intervened."

I was apparently all ears to my wife, but in fact my mind was on the altercation I had had with Shamu Dada's boy. In the first place these people do something reprehensible and if you pull them up for it they make threatening noises. Dada, as I could see, thought that the law was his handmaiden. But he was mistaken. The day he fell foul of the law he would fall flat on his face.

Suddenly my wife stopped talking, her ears attuned to what was being said outside.

It was Shamu Dada speaking.

"Come on, Lalu," he said. "Pick up the bottles. *Sala*, let me see who dares stop me!"

My heart started pounding hard. What I feared most had happened. I looked at my wife. Her face had turned pale. She

caught my hand.

"It's their affair," she said. "Let them have their way. We lose nothing."

"You remain quiet," I said. "There's nothing to worry. If we knuckle down to them, they will start imposing themselves upon us." I got up from my cot.

"Please don't go out," my wife said in a beseeching voice. "You are one against so many. And they are such rogues."

"Don't be silly," I said. "I'm not going to quarrel with them. I'll just have a word with them. There's no harm in it."

I nonchalantly opened the door and came into the street. Shamu Dada was standing there, his hands defiantly resting against his hips and two boys standing by his side, their hands in their trouser pockets. The boy whom I had met before was digging the earth to make a hole in which he could hide the bottles. As I came out they fixedly stared at me

"Oh, *Sala* be careful!" Shamu Dada addressed the boy. "If any bottle breaks I'll. . . your sister." He flung an obscene abuse at the boy.

I stopped at the door-jamb. They turned to me, their eyes dark with rage and contempt.

"Are you Shamu Dada?" I asked in a gentle tone, edging closer to him.

"Yes. But why do you ask?" Shamu snarled like a dog.

"I just wanted to tell you not to hide those bottles here. It causes me inconvenience."

"So what? In that case go and find some other place to hide your darned head. You should have known better than to come to this wretched hole."

"Just try to understand me. You can as will hide your bottles somewhere else."

"The bottles are here and here they will remain. Do what you like!"

His two underlings advanced towards me. "Does this gutter belong to your father?" one of them barked at me.

I was besides myself with rage and felt like hacking off their

heads from their necks. But I soon realized that under such circumstances discretion was the better part of valour. I tried to subdue my anger.

"There is no need to bring in my father," I said in an affable tone. "I'm just trying to make you see reason."

"What harm can you do us?" Shamu growled abusing me filthily. "One slap and you'll grovel in dust. Don't try to rub me the wrong way." Shamu threateningly advandced towards me.

Shamu's abuses aimed at my mother and sister put me in a rage. "Look, Shamu!" I said, raising a threatening finger at him. "Stay within your limits. You're doing something unlawful and on top of that you're threatening me."

"Your law be damned! Your mother be damned!" Shamu was going to pounce upon me when his companion pushed him aside. "Don't Dada!" he said. "Leave this *sala* to me. I'll set the fellow right in no time."

A long knife came out of his pocket and glinted in the air as he flicked open its blade. As I looked at the blade my whole body shook for an instant. Men, women and children came out of their hovels and stood there watching the proceedings with bated breaths. Ants ran down my spine. It was for the first time that I was facing such a situation. My anger had changed into fear and like a terrified child had slunk away somewhere inside me. I stood there petrified, looking at the knife in the hand of that goonda. I could run back and take refuge in my hovel. But it was not easy to slink away for scores of eyes were watching me and critically assessing my every move. To beat a retreat at that moment would have meant my moral death. I would have fallen in their esteem for ever.

The goonda advanced towards me brandishing his knife. I stood still with a show of bravado. I knew what stupendous effort it called for to keep my feet firmly planted there. I was standing on the threshold of my house and that goonda was almost upon me. He faltered for an instant for I seemed to have belied his hope of my slinking back into my room. Instead of

attacking me with his knife he tried to grab my leg. I heard a cry behind me and before I could turn to look I found that my wife had thrown her arms around my waist and was trying to drag me inside the room. She was weeping loudly.

"Go in," she importunated with me. "For God's sake get in," she repeated, dragging me inside the house. She was not strong enough to cope with me but my subconscious mind was lending her a hand in her efforts. Pushing me into the room she bolted the door from inside and burst out crying. For an instant, I felt that except for the sound of her crying the lane outside my door lay hushed in silence. And then a storm of profanities burst upon my ears; they were abusing me. I heard some people interceding on my behalf but my tormentor's fulminations continued for two or three minutes while my wife, her head resting at my feet, kept crying. I sat still on my cot like a statue. Soon it appeared that the storm had abated and the crowd had started melting away. The lane was plunged in silence. Only now and then a stray shrill abuse from a woman's tongue came floating through the air and hit one's ears like a sharp slap. I kept sitting on my cot for what seemed like an interminable time while my wife kept sobbing, her head resting in my lap. My sense of humiliation, mixed with a sense of fear and anger, had caused me great mental anguish. My mind seemed to have run berserk while my heart would not stop pounding violently. In spite of my careful handling the situation had gone awry. It was like a glass tumbler suddenly slipping out of hand and breaking into pieces, its splinters getting embedded in the body and causing profuse bleeding. My plan seemed to have misfired and my plight was like that of a person, beating his arms in the void while crashing to the earth from a great height. At last, I made up my mind to leave this locality with the least delay. But before leaving I was determined to take my revenge on these people for the humiliation they had caused me. But what could I do single-handed? For a long time, I kept brooding over the whole matter. I had fallen in my own eyes. The abuses of those goondas kept resounding in my ears. It only accentuated

my sense of helplessness and my anger in consequence. My wife had stopped crying though her head was still resting in my lap.

"Go and lie down on the *charpoy*," I said, lifting her head from my lap.

Still squatting on the floor, my wife blew her nose into the end of her sari. I got up and proceeded to put on my bush shirt. My wife gave me an apprehensive look. "Where are you going?" she asked.

"Take it easy," I said. "There's nothing to worry. I'm just going to the police station."

"No, you're not going anywhere," my wife said.

"Don't be jittery," I said consoling her. "I'll be back in ten minutes."

"No, no, for God's sake, don't get embroiled with those people," she said. "You don't know them. They are such terrible desperadoes."

"You're worrying for nothing. These people only bully honest, well-meaning people. It's not easy to kill a man. You'll see within ten minutes these rogues will be in handcuffs. It's not a joke to harass good people."

"But you are alone while they are so many of them. How many can you take on single-handed?"

"*Arre*, who said I'm going to fight? I'll just file an FIR and the police will take care of the rest. If we keep tolerating these *bahmash*s they can make our lives miserable. They must be punished for their misdemeanour."

My wife again started crying. "When we are not going to stay here, does it make any sense to pick up enmity with them?"

"You bolt the door from inside," I said in a hard voice. "These things are beyond your comprehension. If those people have the audacity of humiliating us right at our door, don't we even have the right to lodge a complaint against them with the police? I call it downright cowardice. Today they create trouble outside our house, tomorrow they will enter the house."

Softening my tone I continued, "You are quite intelligent

and can get the hang of things. Be bold. I'll be back in no time. Now get up and bolt the door from inside."

I came out my hovel, my wife following me to the door with weary steps. As the door closed upon me I heard her sobs. The lane was quite dark. The doors of the hovels around my own were closed and an eerie silence enveloped the lane. Crossing the lane I ca me to the road, the pale light of the lamp-posts dozing over it. I turned and looked in the direction where Shamu had his hooch shop. Light filtered through the tarpaulin which covered the shop on all sides and there were some people sitting outside on wooden benches, drinking. Nearby sat a man with a brazier making *seekh kabab*. One could hear the sound of laughter and the tinkling of glasses emerging from inside the shop. The shop lay on the way to the police station and I made a detour in order to bypass it. While walking down I applied my mind on the complaint that I would be lodging with the police. This was going to be my first experience with the police and though I was feeling a bit jittery about it my overwhelming desire to teach these rogues a lesson led me on towards the police station. I had heard that the police people were not enamoured of good people. Rather they give them the short shrift. I started thinking as how best to frame the statement by which I could impress the Thana in-charge with my helplessness and anxiety. As I stood before the police station my heart again missed a beat.

Climbing up the stairs, I entered the verandah. A constable was sitting on a bench, mixing lime-paste and tobacco on the palm of his hand. His cap was lying by his side and the light from the electric bulb shone on his bald pate. As his eyes landed on me he gave me an inquisitive look. I stopped in front of him. "I want to lodge a complaint," I said after a brief pause.

"Where are you coming from?" he asked, knitting his brows.

"From Nehru Nagar."

"What happened?" He surveyed me from head to foot.

"Some goondas tried to attack me."

"Hm!" He put the wad of tobacco under his lower lip and

wiping his hand clean of the clinging lime-paste and tobacco pointed in the direction of a door. Walking up I stopped in front of an open door and looked through it. A fat looking man, who was perhaps a Havildar or a Head Constable was entrenched in a chair and was engaged in turning the pages of a file. On a table by his side, a clerk was typing something. Another constable, sitting near the table was yawning leisurely from time to time.

After waiting for a moment I said, "May I come in?"

The Head Constable raised his head from the file and looked at me. The other constable stopped yawning and screwed up his eyes to have a good look at me. With a nod of his head the Head Constable gestured me to come in. I went in and stood near his table.

"What's it?" the Head Constable asked me, turning a page of his file.

"I have to lodge a complaint."

"Where do you live?"

"In Nehru Nagar."

"What happened? Tell me quick." His manner was very brusque.

Carefully weighing my words I began: "Er. . .er. . . the thing is. . . er I live in Nehru Nagar, in block No 5. Shamu Dada has his illicit liquor shop over there. Today his boys tried to attack me with a knife."

"You must have tried to have a row with him," the Head Constable said.

His remark completely stumped me. I had thought that the very mention of the liquor shop would make him wise of the whole thing. He would surely know that Shamu Dada sold hooch illegally. But on seeing the Head Constable's demeanour my heart sank.

"No, I did nothing of the sort," I said in an abject manner.

"Then was there something wrong with his head that he wanted to quarrel with you?"

His harsh tone put me out completely. But gathering my

wits I said, "Er. . . the fact is he was trying to hide bottles of liquor under the drain in front of my house. I objected and he fell out with me."

"Hm! So there you are! But first tell me why did you object."

"Er. . ." I looked at the Head Constable in great surprise. "Saheb, he was hiding liquor right in front of my house. I'm a decent man. Don't I have the right to object?"

The Head Constable looked hard at me. "He was only hiding bottles of liquour, not something else. How did that harm you?"

His remark made me angry and I cursed the fat Head Constable in my heart. But outwardly I kept my cool, "Jamadar Saheb (*Harami Saheb*), he is a goonda, as you know. If I had not objected, tomorrow he would have entered my house with impunity. And as you know, he sells contraband which is illegal."

"Yes, yes, I know all that. Don't try to teach me law. First go in and report to the Saheb. If he asks me to I'll write down your complaint." He pointed towards the closed door of a cabin on his left. Then he turned to the yawning constable who was sprawled in his chair. "Bhale Rao, take this man to the Saheb."

Opening his mouth wide, Bhale Rao took another yawn and then barked out in an uncouth manner, "Come!"

Rising from his chair, he staggered towards the cabin and raising the *chik* entered the cabin. He came out after a few seconds and without looking at me, he said, "Go in," and then staggering back he again sat down in his chair.

Lifting the *chik*, I entered the cabin and was confronted by a man with a big moustache and a perpetual frown on his face. He sat there glaring at me. I swallowed hard and folded my hands in a *namaskar*. There were two empty chairs in front. But I had become so nervous that instead of occupying one of these chairs I just kept standing by the side of the table.

"What's the matter?" the man who looked a Police Inspector asked me in a thick voice.

I had suddenly started feeling thirsty and parched and my hand went to my throat. "Saheb, I've come to lodge a report," I said.

"Where do you live?" he asked me surveying me from head to foot.

"I live in Nehru Nagar," I said in a beseeching voice.

"Sit down." He pointed towards an empty chair.

I sat down in the chair and started narrating to him the details of the altercation with Shamu Dada. I was still narrating when he lighted a cigarette and puffed at it. He was listening to me in a disinterested manner as if he were listening to a worn-out gramophone record. It seemed he was hearing just for the sake of hearing.

As I finished, his eyes sharply turned on me and remained fixed on my face for a while and then his voice grazed my ears. "Now what do you want?"

"Er. . ." I could not understand the purport his question. Perhaps the Inspector had marked the note of hesitation in my voice.

"What do you do?" He immediately fired another question at me.

"Err. . . I'm a clerk in C ward."

"Who else lives with you?"

"Just me and my wife."

"I think you are new to the place."

"Yes, I've been here only for six months."

"I admit you have been wronged and I'm sorry for it. But. . . "

The Inspector's sentence had heartened me. "Sir, if you want. . ."

But I could not complete my sentence. It seemed the Inspector was annoyed at my interrupting him. "First listen to me," he said in a gruff voice.

"Yes, sir." Scared, I withdrew into my shell.

"Look, I can send one or two constables with you," the Inspector said. "I can also haul up Shamu's men and bring them here in handcuffs. But how is it going to help you? The very

next day he will have his men released on bail. And you have to live there in their midst. And he is a notorious goonda. On being released he can be upto anything. Just out of spite. Do you have the strength or means to defy him?"

"But sir, the law."

He silenced me by raising his hand. "Don't bring in the law." He flicked the ash from his cigarette. "I know what the law says. The police can take action on your complaint but it cannot guarntee to save your skin all the twentyfour hours."

I heard the Inspector with bowed head. He lighted another cigarette.

"Look, you are a simple man. If you can manage it, leave this place. But if you have to live there, you must be on good terms with these goondas."

"But sir, he deals in contraband liquor. Can't the police stop his business?"

(And then I suddenly realized that I shouldn't have asked that question.)

For an instant I saw a glint of anger in the Inspector's eyes. He looked at me and said in a grave voice, "The police knows very well what it should do and what it should not. It's not that by stopping Shamu's business we will be able to put an end to all 'black' business."

I wanted to tell him that it may or it may not put an end to 'black' business but it would certainly put an and to his weekly under-the-table receipts from these people. And that was the last thing that the Inspector wanted to happen. But flinging this fact in the Inspector's face was akin to throwing oneself knowingly into a blind well. It could recoil on me. If the Inspector turned hostile to me he could put me in the lock-up. I had so often seen policemen regaling themslves with coca-cola and *seekh-kabab* at Shamu's shop. Once or twice I had even glimpsed the Head Constable there. Surely, it was a mistake on my part to have thoughtlessly rushed up to the police station. To expect justice from these free-wheelers was like expecting benevolence from a miser.

Seeing me sitting lost, the Inspector crushed his cigarette in the ash tray and said, "If you want to lodge a complaint, by all means do so. A constable will accompany you and haul up Shamu Dada to the police station. You may go now."

He rang the bell lying on his table and its sound brought the Head Constable into his room. He told the Head Constable to record my complaint and send Bhale Rao with me.

I followed the Head Constable out of the Inspector's room. Pande, the other constable who was to record my complaint glanced at me in a matter of fact way. One could read weariness and irritation in his face. For an instant, our eyes met.

"I don't want to lodge a complaint," I said and quickly came out of the room. While going out I heard Pande saying to Bhale Rao, "Look at the fellow's cheek. He's spineless like jelly and yet he wants to put himself against Shamu Dada."

I looked at my wrist watch. It was going on to be ten. Almost all the shops had closed. Only the New Star Hotel was open. And I saw a few people standing in front of the *paan* shop. I took out a ten paisa coin from my pocket and buying a Panama lighted it from the wick of the lamp kept for the purpose.

Puffing at the cigarette I proceeded towards my *mohalla*. My mind had almost gone blank. I was not angry at Shamu Dada nor at the Head Constable or the Police Inspector. I thought all the three of them were cast in the same mould. The Inspector's talk had given me a jolt. I thought truth, justice and decency were nothing but academic concepts, not having even a distant relation to life. In our times, people look at honest and decent people with the same detestation with which Brahmins looked at untouchables once.

Crossing the railway line I came to the narrow lane where a wave of stench rising from the drain greeted my nostrils. I entered the *mohalla*. Shamu's shop was still open, marked by the same kind of din and gaiety. The brazier of the *seekh kabab* was still blazing and the tinkle of glasses and the profanities of the revellers were floating in the air.

I hesitated for a moment and then instead of taking the path that led to my house, I turned towards Shamu Dada's shop. Approaching the shop I surveyed the scene. There were five or six people sitting on the benches, eating *seekh kabab* and drinking liquor. Two boys were attending to the customers, one of them being the same who had threatened me with a knife.

As I came into the arc of light, he gave me a startled look and handing his bottle to the other boy, whispered something to him. The other boy turned to look at me and then quickly disappeared into the shop. With the first boy's eyes still fixed on me, I went and sat down on a bench. Just then Shamu Dada came out, wearing *lungi* and banian. There were two other boys with him. From his looks, Shamu Dada's intentions seemed to be far from friendly.

"Who's he?" he asked the first boy in a sharp voice. My eyes were fixed on him. Walking with deliberate steps he stopped in front of me, the boys standing around him in a semi-circle. The revellers had also stopped drinking and were watching us as if they had a foreboding that something unusual was in the offing. I kept looking at Shamu.

Pulling up his *lungi* he said in a menacing voice, "What's up now?"

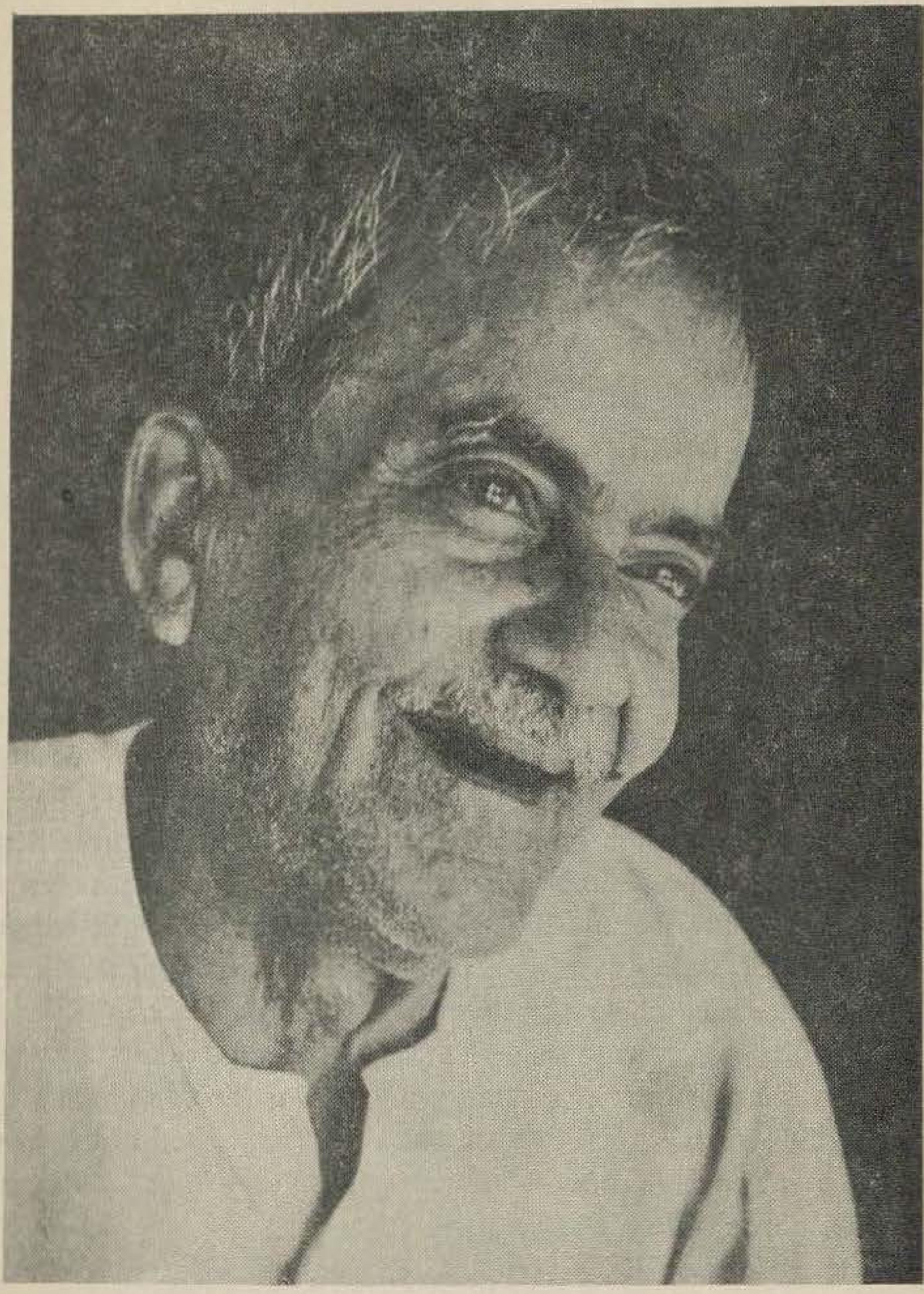
Our eyes met. His eyes were letting out sparks. I said in a calm voice, "One *pau mosammi* and one soda!"

The end of the *lungi* slipped from Shamu's hand and he looked at me in surprise.

Shamu's boys, standing in a semi-circle, gave one another quizzical looks. My action was most unexpected and they watched me silently and immobile like statues. Now the boot was on the other leg. This time, instead of me, it was they who were looking helpless. It gave me a vicarious satisfaction. For a few moments no one spoke. Then I said in the same calm and staid voice, "And one plate of fried liver to go with the *mosammi!*"

'Anjam Kar'

Tr. from Urdu by JAI RATAN



Ambikagiri Raichoudhuri

Patriot-poet of Assam

A Birth-centenary Tribute

His Poetry was a Forest Fire

BIRENDRA KUMAR BHATTACHARYYA

THE life of Ambikagiri Raichaudhuri is as interesting as his poetry and prose writings, there being a strong visible interaction between the two throughout his literary career. In his case, poetry or prose writings were the expression of his personality. The aesthetics of his poetry was romantic, based on unusual sound effects and imagery. His radical nationalism, nurtured in the Swadeshi and Non-cooperation Movements in the first half of the twentieth century, was expressed in songs, poems, oratorial and evocative prose, as well as political action. Love for his beloved, marked by intensity of enhanced feelings, found its ultimate consummation in transcendental poetry addressed to an imagined essential thing, which was the source of both beauty and truth. His view of poetry, as expressed in his own statement about his poems and songs, is very much different from the contemporary view of poetry:

> Those wise men who enjoy relishing the *rasa* of poetry may not call them (*i.e., his poems*) poems and denounce them as 'natural forest fires'. Certainly these are wild fires raging in my heart. The fire has reduced my heart to ashes.

The poet at times saw only manikins around him, and not men. He calls them *jada-bharatas*, a heap of cold stones. His heart had

merged in the country. The fire burnt both, the fire of the spirit.

Some of his songs, available in English translation as *Songs of the Cell*, are both invocatory and evocative. The translation was done by his friend and reputed scholar-critic, the late Dr Banikanta Kakati (1894-1952). The title refers to a period of the poet's life spent in jail. He wrote and sang his poems while undergoing the rigours of hard labour imposed by a foreign power on a political prisoner. The title, 'Songs of the Cell', aptly expresses the spirit of the songs. Some of them were sung on public occasions and at the 1926 session of the Indian National Congress in Pandu, Assam, and at the Assam Association Sessions. All these songs were placed at the service of the nation in the cause of revolution and reconstruction. Lakshminarayan Sahu, the Oriya social worker, associated with the Servant of India Society, has rightly observed in his Preface that "Ambikagiri's songs are soul-reaching and at times soul-piercing too."

As the Publisher says: "All but the tenth and eleventh poems were composed in prison cells when the author was incarcerated twice in connection with the fight for Swaraj. The tenth and eleventh were composed and sung as opening songs at the Indian National Congress held at Pandunagar in 1926."

These poems of his early years were marked by a spirit of Indianness that is remarkable for its breadth of patriotic imagination.

Two Poems

AMBIKAGIRI RAICHOUDHURI

ONE

THE LIFE
tormented by thunder-like
sufferings, sorrows and despairs,
lights the Flame
that shines
above the great dance of Rudra,
the Conqueror of Time.

This is the fire of life
that turns to ashes
the fetters and bondages,
that limit the free energy of creation.

This is the fire
that consumes weariness
and inspires mankind
on the path of restless efforts.
Freed from insults,
humiliations and vexations,
the life that shines brighter

than jewels and pearls.
The life
which purges out envy, timidity,
cowardice, jealousy,
is the life full, sublime, and serene.

This life
weeds out the roots of oppression
and establishes the kingdom of joy
and harmony in this universe.

TWO

WHAT for is the sky and earth,
what for is this universe?
There is no answer
to this riddle eternal.
O man, march towards infinity
with all your might and dignity.

In this bounded world
reason and logic are crippled,
Fame and fortune of mankind
totter away.
The accumulated wisdom of centuries
whirling round this limited space,
turns blind and futile.
Hence this hobbling in human life,
And rise and fall its eternal history.

The little advance it makes today
is lost in tomorrow's defeat.

Yet, alas! you strive not
to break the barrier.
This vision of breaking the barrier
is not a myth;
it is not telling a rosary of idle
thoughts in this little hollow
of the earth.

O man! if you could march
in all your glory and strength
and establish your rule
in the other planets,
only then and then only
human achievements
will be truly glorious.

And on earth,
life will be ampler and richer,
spreading upto infinity for ever.
The putrid wisdom of humanity
will be freed and boundless,
transcending the prison walls
of limited space.

O man,
clinging to this rotten earth,
why do you deny the great
growing tide of life.

from *Songs of the Cell*

Tr. from Assamese by B.K. KAKATI

Ambikagiri Raichoudhuri: His Life and Work

SATYENDRANATH SARMA

IT is a happy coincidence that the birth-centenary of Ambikagiri Raichoudhuri, one of the powerful nationalist poets of Assam, now being celebrated all over the state starting from December 1985 falls about the same time as the centenary of the Indian National Congress. Ambikagiri Raichoudhuri was born in December 1885, in a Kayastha family of traditional culture, at Barpeta, a place hallowed by the memories and religious activities of Sankaradeva, the Assamese saint-poet and religious reformer of the sixteenth century. In fact, Raichoudhuri's family traces its ancestry to Ramaray *alias* Jagatananda, a well-to-do and powerful cousin of Sankaradeva.

Raichoudhuri studied up to the lower secondary class and left the school at the age of 14. His native genius and hard work, however, enabled him to acquire a fair knowledge of the world around him. A man of versatile achievements, he was a poet and dramatist, a song-writer and composer, an actor and organiser of operas and circus parties, a freedom-fighter and also an uncompromising fighter in the cause of the identity of the Assamese language and culture, a visionary who dreamed of a world state to be run on the basis of human values and spiritualism.

During the movement against the partition of Bengal and the merger of Assam with East Bengal in 1904, Raichoudhuri, then a young man, aged nineteen, joined hands with some Bengali terrorists operating in Guwahati. He along with his comrades set fire to the European club which was completely gutted down by fire.

Raichoudhuri's first literary work, a drama, *Vandini Bharat* (Imprisoned India), depicting the slavery of India under the oppressive foreign rule, was written and staged on the occasion of the annual Saraswati Puja day, but the play, immediately after its performance, was seized and forfeited. He was kept as a detenu for nearly five years within the jurisdiction of Barpeta town from 1908 to 1913. At that time, Bengali plays of a melodramatic kind were staged by the theatre-lovers, rejecting Assamese plays as undramatic and insipid. Young Raichoudhuri took up the challenge to produce Assamese plays, worthy of being staged with equal effect. Accordingly, he wrote three melodramatic plays, viz., *Jayadrathavadha*, *Bhakta-gaurava* and *Kalyanamayee*, which were successfully staged under the playwright's own direction. The first two plays are based on episodes from the great epic, while the last is a historical play considerably coloured by the dramatist's own imagination. These plays, written in 1911-12, though melodramatic in treatment, nevertheless bring out the writer's patriotic fervour and his commitment to the cultural heritage of the country.

In his autobiographical work, *Mor Jivan Dhumuhar Achati* (A Blast of Storm in My Life), Raichoudhuri candidly narrates an interesting incident from his early life. When he was seventeen, Raichoudhuri fell in love with a Bengali girl, aged 11, and to prove the sincerity of his love for her, he severed his little finger with a sharp knife and wrote a letter in blood beseeching her to stand by him and inspire him in his service to the motherland in the freedom struggle. He presented the severed finger and the letter to the girl in a small casket. The girl was soon taken away by her guardians to Bengal. The poet admits that though she was not physically present by his side, her invisible

presence with her smiling moon-like face used to inspire him through thick and thin throughout his life. The incident reminds us of Dante's devotion to Beatrice.

The love inspired by this girl of a tender age later transcended into mystic love. His three earlier poetical works, *Tumi* (Thou, 1915), *Vina* (The Lute, 1916) and *Venu* (The Flute) were composed during the period of detention at Barpeta. His detention was lifted in 1913 and consequently he shifted his residence to Dibrugarh in Eastern Assam where he continued to stay till the end of 1917. He returned to Guwahati in 1918 and lived there for the rest of his life. He died in January, 1967.

Love generated by the physical beauty of a girl of tender age in his adolescence gradually matured and took a mystic aura with the passage of time. The transformation is reflected in the long poem 'Tumi' exuding intense lyrical fervour. The poem begins with a description of the bewitching physical beauty and charm of a blooming maiden and ends with a feeling of spiritual fulfilment having perceived the all-enveloping cosmic beauty and glory reflected in the entire creation. The transition from the particular to the universal is best illustrated in a small lyric entitled 'Tandra-bhanga' (Awakening from Drowsiness):

Rāṇir oṭhat phatikā atupi pi,
yug yug śata āchilo nidhāl di,
tandrā-hāluk matta citar pāl
raṅgāi-bolāi caril kata abuj bethār jāl
sei jālātor āre āre rāṇīr runu-junu,
rupto bukat nuṭhe phuli keval sāri śunu
Āji tandrā tutil, rāgī bhāgil, rāṇik āgat palō
Ibār oṭhat nahay padat amar sudha pilo.

Having sipped the honeyed wine from the lips of my beloved queen, I was in a state of intoxicated stupor for ages. Multi-coloured webs of indescribable sorrow were spreading across the wavering sail of my mind. I could hear the tinkling sound of her anklets, but her entire contour did not appear in full bloom, only her existence was faintly felt. Today, my drowsiness having come to an end, I could see her in full view. I have now tasted the immortal nectar at her feet instead of from her lips.

The lyric records the poet's transformation from the sensual love to the spiritual. The same note of mystic ecstasy, wistfulness and agony of separation from the Beloved with an occasional defiance to the Supreme is also noticed in the lyrics of *Vina* and *Venu*. Lyrics of this phase are marked by the spiritual yearning, romantic imagination, sweetness of diction, spontaneity and lucidity.

Since the advent of the Congress in Assam in 1920, the attitude of the poet underwent a sea-change. From the heights of romantic mysticism, he came down to the stark realities of the life around him. The grinding poverty, exploitation and oppression of Indians under the foreign rule, the vitiated social life of degradation, economic inequality, caste-division, superstition and drug-addiction and other vices opened the eyes of the poet to the vistas of national regeneration. After he met Mahatma Gandhi in 1921, while the latter was touring Assam in connection with the Non-cooperation Movement, Raichoudhuri became a staunch follower of the Mahatma and his Non-violence. He joined the movement and worked in right earnest. He was arrested and put behind the bars for two years. When in jail he was engaged in breaking stones, pressing oil and in such other manual labour. He composed some poems while doing such hard labour. A few of these poems were translated into English under the title *Songs of the Cell.* The English renderings, though they do not adequately reproduce the vibration of the original composition, can nevertheless give an idea of the lyrics. Here is a specimen[1], composed while breaking stones:

It is with limbs broken and maimed,
with blood gushing through the mouth,
with a heart languid to exhaustion
that thou will see the fetters unloosed.
Stones thou wilt have to break

1. Extracts from the lyrics quoted here (with minor modifications) are taken from the *Songs of the Cell*, an anthology of English renderings of a few poems of Ambikagiri Raichoudhuri by B.K. Kakati. —*Ed.*

standing, falling, gasping;
then only the heart of the stones will burst
and heavenly river will flow
in rapid streams.

In the poem 'Hold the Broomstick', he writes:

Hated and humiliated,
you have slaved
in others' causes so long,
you have offered yourself
at other's feet
in poverty and debt,
now is come the time
to turn a sweeper
of your people
whose breath is suffocated
by the stench of malice and jealousy,
vanity and selfishness,
caste-hatred and a hundred other vices.

He urges upon the Hindus and the Muslims to stand united against the foreign ruler. The following extract carries the plea for joint struggle:

Awake, Awake, Hindus and Moslems,
children of Mother India;
The conch-shell of deliverance
sounds piercing through the plains of Jalianwala Bagh,
painted red with the heart's blood
of a million brothers.
Awake, men and women,
trodden under the iron-heels of
bloodthirsty demons.

Raichoudhuri not only sings of the struggle for liberation, but also at the same time emphasizes the urgency of raising the national character through hard work, unity and integration. Sloth, jealousy and drug-addiction were the bane of our national life. In his patriotic poems, the poet frequently casti-

gates these vices. His lyric 'Agni-Vina' eulogizes a life of struggle, and qualities like manliness, strength and boldness find a natural expression in it:

Mine is not a song of laughter and
revelry cooling weary limbs;
Mine is a stroke on the harp of fire
that unifies the quick and the dead.
My song is an endless heat
coming out of a hundred burning losses,
insults
and humiliations.
It is the firey vapour
oozing out from the imprisoned energy
of the soul.
Mine is a song of gods and demons
sung over the churning of the ocean for nectar,
It is a song over the drinking of *Kālakuta* poison
to attain the position of
a death-conqueror.

In the poem 'Mai Tandavi, Mai Viplavi' (I am a Destroyer, and Revolutionary), the poet wants to dance a dance of destruction and eradicate all evils of the creation for a new regeneration, but finally decides that before trying to destroy anything outside his own self he must undergo a great revolution within and destroy all evil tendencies of his ego. Then and then only he should try to cleanse the outside world. In the first few lines of the poem, he raises the question as where he should begin his dance:

I am a time-conquering revolutionary,
I am a time-destroying dancer.
Where shall I raise my revolution?
Where shall I dance my *tandava?*

Another feature of his poetry is that it is a clarion-call to the Assamese to stand united with heads erect against any onslaught on their ethnic, cultural and historical identity by outside forces including unhealthy foreign influences. Though he fought

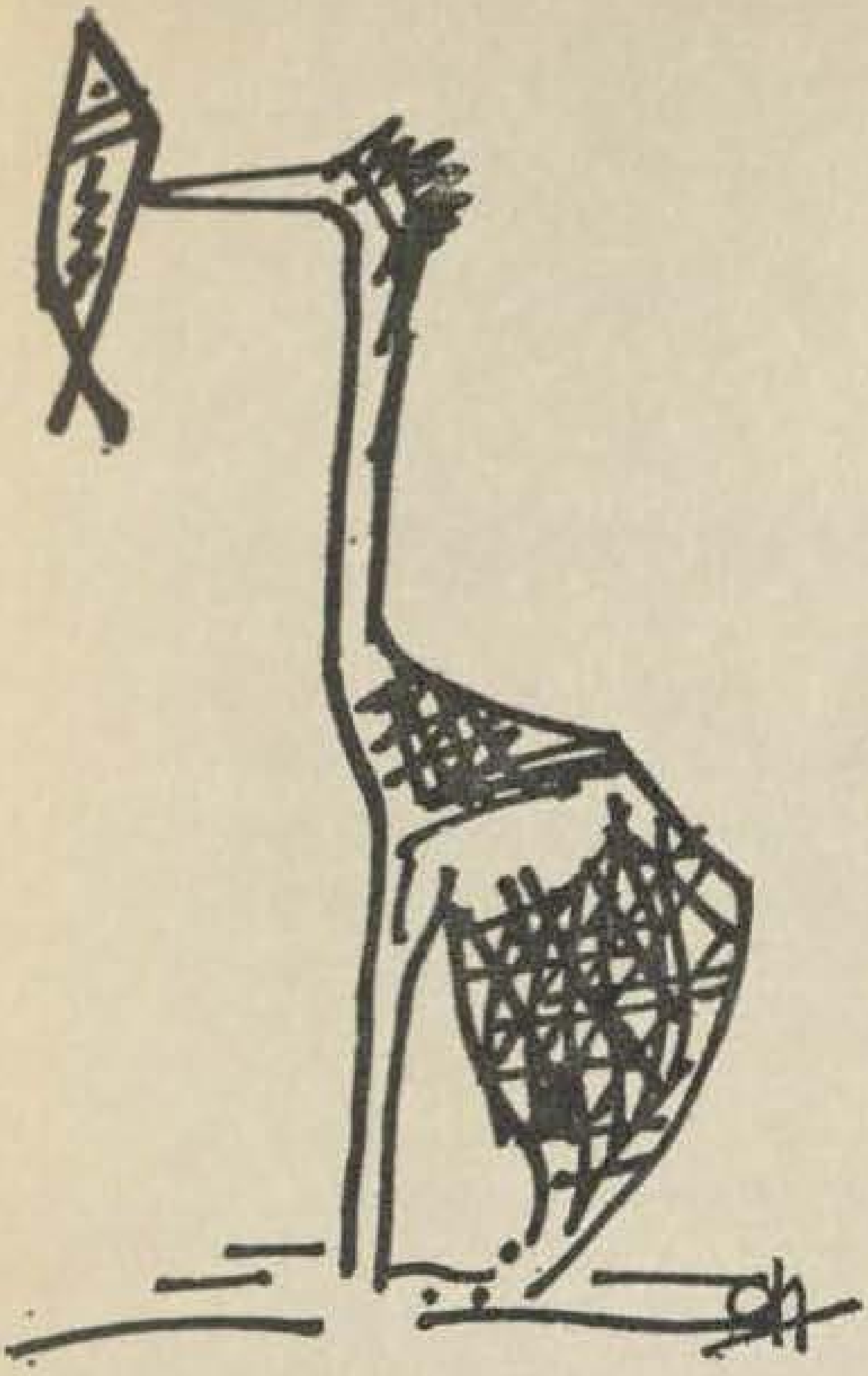
for the preservation of the identity of the Assamese he was not a separatist: he was an Assamese-Indian. He did not propagate or visualize an Assam outside the map of India. Nowhere in his poetry or prose did he espouse a separate political existence, outside India. When Pakistan and China attacked India he harnessed his poetic gift to rouse the feeling of patriotism in every Indian irrespective of caste, creed and community for the defence of India. His lyrics entitled 'At the Time of the Chinese Aggression' (*China Akramanar Samayat*) and 'We are the Sentinels of India in the East' (*Bharatar Purvaprantaraksi Ami Acho, Ami Acho*) and 'Be Immortal by defending your Freedom' (*Swadhinata Raksa Kari Chira Amar Howa*) speak eloquently of his Indianness.

The poetry of Raichoudhuri falls distinctly into two phases. The first phase which includes the lyrics of *Tumi* and *Vina* and some compositions of *Anubhuti*, comprising approximatelv 150 short and long lyrics, have, for their theme, lovelornness leaning heavily on the mystical side. This phase covers the period from 1910 to 20. The second covers the poetry written during the rest of his life, till his death in 1967. This period extending over 40 years includes some poems of *Anubhuti*, *Vedanar Ulka* (Shooting Star of my Pain), *Desei Bhagavan* (My Country is My God). Lyrics of the later phase are marked by martial qualities of sound, sense and rhythm. The earlier smooth and sonorous verses, clothing his spiritual and mystic urge, where pangs of separation, wistful longing, eager waiting, a sense of absolute self-surrender and occasional ecstasy are replaced by vigorous soul-stirring and blood-curdling verses, awakening his countrymen from their torpid life and inspiring and goading them to break the chain of slavery. The exact impact of his patriotic verses cannot be reproduced in another language. He uses syllabic metres in his love-lyrics, whereas, in the patriotic poems, he switches over to stressed meters. The following lines bear testimony to the early phase of his poetry where a mystic note is clearly resonant with the spiritual urge:

As I rise
let me paint the feet
with my blood.
When thou frolickst in the evening sky
spraying *abir* all around
make me the whirling dust
of thy feet,
so that I might roam
from pole to pole, star to star
singing thy praises.
When thou reclinest thy weary limbs
on the starry carpet of the blue sky,
when melodious music
floats around there
in thanksgiving and panegyric,
let me then utterly lose myself
in singing thy hymns and prayers.

Raichoudhuri was a musician and as such he set to music many of his lyrical compositions and himself used to sing them on important public occasions. He was one of the best exponents of Bargeet, a semi-classical genre of devotional songs prevalent since the sixteenth century.

Raichoudhuri was also a powerful prose-writer. He edited two papers for a number of years through which he strongly pleaded for the independence of India consistent with the preservation of the ethnic and linguistic identity of different regions including Assam. Although he was sometimes branded as a provincialist and chauvinist by a section of people with vested interests, he was an out-and-out nationalist with this difference that he advocated for the preservation of regional identities. His prose, rugged but powerful, reflects his personality. As far back as 1914, he envisioned the conquest of space and advocated for the colonization of some planets to lighten the burden of population explosion on earth. At that time, it was considered as an utopian dream, but now we know that it is no longer an unrealizable proposition.



Book Reviews

A Massive Study of the Mahabharata

The Mahabharata: A Literary Study
by Krishna Chitanya
Clarion Books, New Delhi-1
pp, 462, Rs. 175. 1985.

LIKE Krishna Chaitanya, I too learned the story of the *Mahabharata*, first from my grandmother, but more fully from my maternal grandfather during a four-hour bullock-cart drive. For my School Certificate course, one of the rapid-reading texts was a condensed version of the epic by Channing Arnold. Since then, during the last 60 years, I have from time to time returned to Vyasa in brief or *in extenso*, and have also come across writings (creative or critical) derived from or inspired by his poem. I cannot of course claim Krishna Chaitanya's enyclopaedic sweep of interests, his mastery of languages and knowledges, his far-ranging scholarship, nor yet his dialectical resilience. It is as a 'common reader' I now set down my reactions to his massive study of the world's most formidable poetic creation, the *Mahabharata*.

The name immediately invokes the ancient scenario that led to the 18-day fratricidal war between the sons of Dhritarashtra and those of his late younger brother, Pandu. Equally, or even more universally, it recalls the *Gita*, the tense Arjuna-Krishna dialogue on the eve of the actual start of hostilities. There are several other Discourses too, Upakhyanas and episodes, and seeming diversions and intrusions, and there are scholars who are ready

to exclude some or all of them from the hard-core lay-out of the epic narrative. But I am glad Krishna Chaitanya is firm in his conviction that the *Gita* itself is no later excrescence but is inseverable from the being and essence of the epic. As he neatly puts it:

> The whole here is the epic; it is a poem; the *Gita* is its integral component and a truly poetic component. (p. xx)

In the result, as he concedes, the present work is "two studies in one: of the epic and of the *Gita*".

One may perhaps see a double or complementary movement in the *Mahabharata*, the whole misadventure of cousinly rivalry fatalistically converging to the battle, the brief *Gita* interlude in suspended Time with the confronting armies humped in silence, and anon the other movement, the eighteen days of fighting, the nearly achieved mutual destruction—and the aftercourses. It would not be far-fetched therefore to view the *Gita* as the mind, heart and soul of the saga, the Kuru battlefield being doubled with the powerhouse of Dharma, and even trebled with the transcendent heaven of the Grace of Moksha, for that is Krishna's culminating Magna Carta. And by bardic sleight of hand, the most humdrum amongst us is enabled to identify his current predicament on life's scaffold with warrior Arjuna's, and breathlessly look for the saving clue in Krishna's music of many notes crescendoing in *ma sucha*: 'Have no fear!'

I am, however, unable to appreciate Krishna Chaitanya's rejection of what he calls "this grotesquely comic strip-tease" (p. xxiv). i.e. Dussasana's attempt to disrobe Draupadi in the Kuru court. Surely there is a world of difference between Draupadi's terrible predicament and a cabaret dancer's 'strip-tease' act. If the objection is to the miraculism implied, how about Krishna's 'visvarupa' in Book XII of the *Gita*? It is not newspaper naturalism that we look for in great poetry but the 'higher realism' of even the probable impossible. In his *Pānchāli Śapatam* (Panchali's Vow), Subramania Bharati retains the atrocity of Dussasana's disrobing of Draupadi. Besides, in the Pre-

face to his Tamil version of the *Gita*, Bharati recalls Ramanuja's doctrine of *prapatti* (surrender to the Divine), and adds:

> It is only when she (Draupadi) removed her hand from the robe that she was wearing, and lifted the hand, above her head, that through the Grace of Lord Krishna her honour was saved and robes grew on her and tired the hands of Dussasana.[1]

After this, with the rest of the assembly reduced to insect insignificance, Draupadi waxes into a fearful Goddess of Revenge, leaves her dishevelled tresses ungathered into a knot, turns on her unmanly tormentors in a blaze of fury, and pronounces the ominous uncompromising vow that decrees the total doom of the Kauravas. And (in Bharati's poem)—

> The gods said, "So be it".
> "So be it" resounded the skies.
> The earth shook and rumbled,
> and a whirlwind tore through the world.
> The five elements bore witness
> that Dharma is alone Lord of the earth.[2]

Krishna Chaitanya himself draws pointed attention to Dhritarashtra's foreboding about "Satyaki dragging and molesting the entire Kaurava army as if it were a weak, helpless woman" (p. 42), and makes this comment:

> The recurring image, not only epitomises theme; it follows the Karmic maturation of crime as fear and final retribution.

The dragging of Draupadi to the court and the outrageous molestation are the nodal point in the epic, its 'fathomless zero'; now Grace redeems her, and her vow starts the remorseless process of retribution.

As befits a 'literary study', an 'extended literary evaluation', Krishna Chaitanya's presentation begins with a brief summary

1. English translation by Prema Nandakumar.
2. Prema Nandakumar, *Poems of Subramania Bharati*, p. 132. 1982.

of the poem followed by a profile of Vyasa the poet, and a series of vivid character-sketches—Dhritarashtra, Duryodhana; Bhishma, Drona, Aswatthama, Baladeva; Karna, Yudhishtira; and the triad of great women, Draupadi, Kunti and Gandhari. In effect, an attempt at the etching of a character becomes a selective recapitulation of the epic itself. And so, at last, we plunge into the epic action.

Krishna Chaitanya correctly describes the year of concealment in Virata as a 'dress rehearsal' for the war to come. In the interim between the near-end of the exile and the start of the Kurukshetra war, there is a seminal discussion between Yudhishtira, Bhima and Draupadi. And, in the end, "it does make some advance towards the final perspectives of the epic which will eliminate the double fallacy that force by itself can arbitrate justice so that a just life will always and necessarily be a materially rewarded life" (p. 200). While issues may be raised and debated, they can be resolved only at a high level of consciousness, a Himalayan peak of discernment and divination. "This peak is the *Gita* discourse" (p. 206).

For the rest, the *Gita* holds the stage, and Krishna Chaitanya at once brings out the tenor of the Divine discourse, its close filiations with the living body of the epic, and its burning relevance to our own world perilously and precariously poised between the two superpowers with 60,000 nuclear warheads between them, and the Panchalas, Viratas, Saindhavas and the rest wondering in which camp they will find themselves in the eventual global holocaust. The point is well made at the outset that, not philosophy that endlessly keeps to the circumference or hops from segment to segment, but poetry that leaps into the middle or reaches the centre like an arrow, can best convey the Divine Message to Man, and best project the Man-Deity partnership in the shaping of History. Sanjaya sees all, hears all, and reports everything to Dhritarashtra whose deeper moral blindness is even worse than the outer physical. Jnanadeva's comments on Sanjaya's melting experience (XVIII. 74) inspires what (according to R.D. Ranade) is the "most famous passage" in

the Marathi classic, *Dhyaneshwari*, in which Sanjaya tells the old blind King:

> There is only a difference of names, O Dhritarashtra, between the eastern ocean and the western ocean, but really speaking, the waters in both are identical. Similarly their bodies. . . Arjuna saw himself along with God in God, and God saw Himself along with Arjuna in Arjuna. . .[1]

The Nara-Narayana duality has disappeared, and Sanjaya himself—like a salt doll being dissolved in the confluence of two waters—participates in the unitive experience. But Dhritarashtra is a piece of rock, and defies the waters. So are all those caged in their respective granite cells. However, Krishna Chaitanya himself prefers 'the sobriety' of Ramanuja's qualified monism to the absolute monism of the Advaitin, for "the world soul (Narayana) that created the universe and guided its evolution through eons is obviously a far greater entity than the personality of (Nara) the individual" (p. 382).

The Arjuna-Krisnna dialectic is perennially played before us, and we end either as enlightened Sanjayas or (more often) as doubly-blind Dhritarashtras. And the drama goes on. . .

Following the twists and turns of the Arjuna-Krishna debate, I have sometimes been reminded of the run from Kalka on the plains to the heights of Simla. As N.C. Kelkar once described it:

> . . . the train had to take so many turns that no direction was left out. . . At so many places, we felt as if we were going ahead, putting Simla itself behind our back. . .

Even so, from the Kalka that is Arjuna's (and our) Viśāda Yoga, we slowly scale higher, negotiate hair-pin bends, pause at and proceed from Sankhya, Karma, Jnana, Dhyana, Vibhuti, Visvarupa Darsana, Bhakti, Kshetra-Kshetrajna Vibhaga, Purushottama, and last turn of all, Sraddhatraya Vibhaga, and so to the desired dizzy destination, Sannyasa Yoga, the peak itself. The *Gita* con-

1. *Pathways to God in Marathi Literature*, p. 108. 1961.

tains, says Swami Prabhavananda, "metaphysical truths in their diverse aspects, and embodies every form of religious thought, practice and discipline".[1] The roads to freedom are, indeed, so many, and yet, there is the 'Kingsway' too!

After citing a passage from Kenneth Kaunda, Krishna Chaitanya remarks that

> Vyasa lends himself to, and actually needs, annotation with contemporary references. . . because his analytical mind penetrated into all the complexities of social living, all the problems of politics" (p. 287).

Talking of the contemporary world, there are Arjuna and Naras enough around and within, but Krishna-Narayana—how are we to understand him? Chaitanya writes that while Vyasa's Krishna,

> In revelatory but also visionary moments can suggest in apparitional form the visage of deity behind the veil of the world,. . . (he) has only the resources open to man for acting on the plane of history and affecting events. (p. 306)

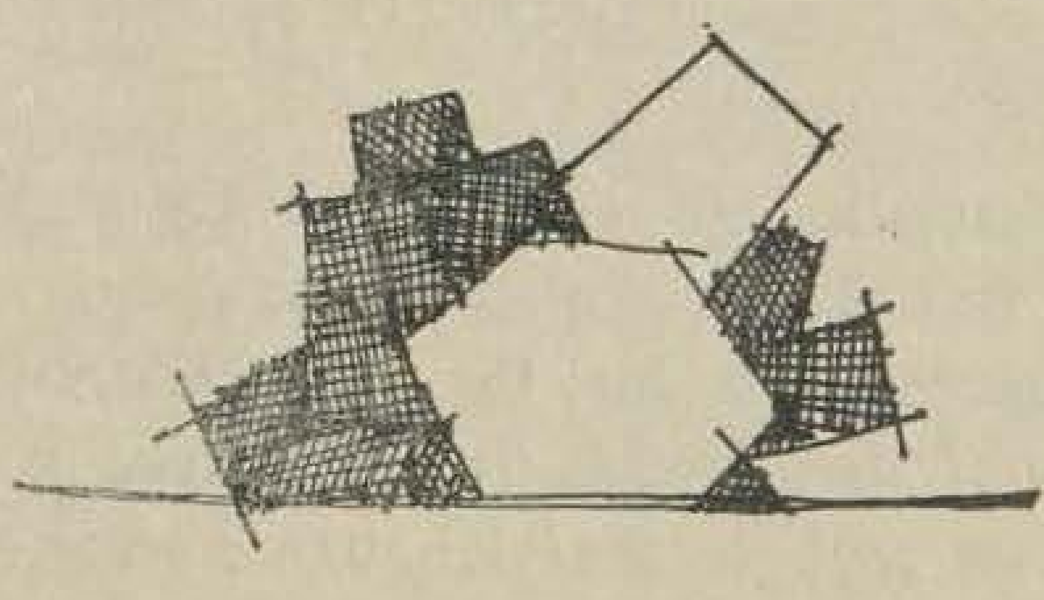
Krishna Chaitanya expatiates also on the Nara-Narayana or Man-Deity relationship becoming a partnership here—"on this bank and shoal of Time"—to enact history, evolutionary history. And, finally, at another level of understanding, Krishna is "the friend within, projected as a person for the needs of the plot, the poet's metaphor, as the friend of Arjuna" (p. 386).

The *Gita*'s gospel of desireless action: the inevitability of violence in certain situations; the divine-human theatre of history; the heroic resolve of Karna to save his soul at the cost of his life; the hierarchy of values from Artha-Kama, through Dharma, to Moksha: all are forcefully brought out in the later chapters. In the attempt to project the philsophy of the *Gita* against a background of world philosophy of all ages and climes, the argument often gets weighted with references to a very large number of thinkers and writers old and new and

1. *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, p. 97. 1977.

a resort sometimes to a kind of jargon—for example, "linear, single-tracked and unidirectional causality" (p. 241) and "super-ordinate transcendental intentionality" (p. 337)—that make the whole demonstration seem learned but really clogs the easy flow of meaning. On the other hand, Krishna Chaitanya helps the 'common reader' by underlining (or italicising) the key sentences in his exposition so that by merely re-reading these observations one can glimpse the steady progress of the argument. There can never be *the* definitive study of a work so colossal and so perpetually contemporaneous as the *Mahabharata*, but certainly Krishna Chaitanya's work will be warmly and widely welcomed for presenting the cardinal issues posed by the epic in the idiom of our time, and for reading in Vyasa's 'Fifth Veda' a timely warning "against the mushroom cloud that can envelop the whole planet and render toxic to life what little it leaves undestroyed" (p. 451). Kurukshetra is *here*, here in our miserably shrunk Global Village, but the conclusion of the human adventure is yet to be concluded; and while history is "still capable of being redeemed if there is a partnership between man and deity", with the Reagans and Gorbachevs holding the stage, what may we hope for? Or is Krishna somewhere behind the wheel, after all, and unperceived by us redeeming the time and safeguarding the future?

K.R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR



Two Short Story Anthologies from Oriya

Motile, Sub-surface Reality

The Magic Deer
by Jagannath Prasad Das
Tr. by the Author
Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.
Pp. 119, Rs. 50. 1983.

WITH some exceptions these stories have a richness about them. It overcomes even the characteristically excitable quality of certain types of Indian writing in English. The excitability, so ingrained in Das's idiom as to affect the traits of dry wit and understatement that mark English, would seem to call for a closer examination. Here is a sample from 'Renunciation'. The underlined phrases voice a high-pitched and extreme assertiveness that does not seem native to English.

> The Kanyashram had strange rules: girls *once admitted were not allowed to go out of the school till they finished their studies.* Girls would therefore stay in the school *for ten to twelve years at a stretch and it was only once in a while that a member of their family would come and meet them. Most of the* girls were from *very poor families* and had come from *long distances,* and *once admitted* in the school were *virtually cut off from their families.* The girls were *not allowed* to go outside the ashram boundaries and the Swamiji *was very strict about* this discipline.

The passage describes an entrenched social feature. In the mother tongue this feature would not need the detailed explanation given in the English. Just the word 'Kanyashram' would be enough. Even if the passage is a verbatim translation of the Oriya, it would still, in that language, sound a harmless and allowable dilation, a repetition of a familiar system. It would not carry the anxious explanatory tone of the English

This kind of economy and strength of allusion is lost to the Indian writer writing in English. The difference between the outstanding writer and the writer of talent only lies, perhaps, in the way each circumvents and makes up for the loss. The outstanding writer would be on guard against the winded and explanatory tone. He would put trust in his unfolding of the story to provide the dictionary meanings. The writer of talent fills up the gap by piling in gushy stress words that add nothing to the substance or content of the story.

The stress words could have condemned Das's work as undistinguished if it were not for his surrealistic vision which imparts a shadow-play effect to the stories. With eel-like agility, he can slip from the immediate, knotty present to a soothing, non-existent, dream present. This consistent vision of an underground reality levers up the stories from the steady but uninflectioned voice and the hollowed language.

The vision seems to be of more than one sort. For Padmadhar, the protagonist of 'The Reality', it is a debilitating malaise. Everything is wrong in Padmadhar's life. As a teacher, it is brought home to him with ruthless and effortless clarity by his students that he is a bore. His wife is the woman he would rather not have married. He is neck-deep in an unending lawsuit which he has filed with the typical bravado of the weak against his landlord for threatened eviction. In dull mental manipulation, waiting for his lawyer to show up, he recomposes the court-room scene into a heroic battle for justice being waged by prisoners of war captured in the Sepoy Mutiny. In the evening, after the usual day in court of procedural wrangles and bottlenecks he steps out. He partly drifts and partly steers in the direction of the street where lives the woman he would have liked to marry. He does not see her. A chance happening puts him off course. He wends his way back home and coaxes the face of his beloved to float into his mind as he feels his wife snuggling up to him.

In the title story 'The Magic Deer', the below-the-surface reality surfaces slightly and makes gossamer inroads into the body

of the story. The deer, not easily got, is needed by a theatre group for staging the Rama story. And exactly like the deer in the *Ramayana* the chase for it leads the characters into unexpected situations. There is a random air about the events. But it is intentional and hence controlled. The below-the-surface reality here is nothing particularized as in the story mentioned earlier, but is the story itself. In the process, the theme undergoes an adequate expansion as one about illusions: the illusion of will, of power, of fame, of happiness through having in plenty. In this expansion, one sees a bolder and more total projection of the artistic dictum held by Das that the data conveyed by the five senses of man are so much shifting sand.

In 'Deliverance', the sub-surface-reality acquires a terrifying motility, bursting into the open and seizing the waking consciousness of Anasuya, the central figure, and exploding into a stunning violence. The sub-surface-reality here is not an unattainable and soothing dream-reality. It is an ominous piece of self-knowledge that Anasuya has, namely, that she counts for nothing in the world. The story of Anasuya's life is the story of her futile efforts to defeat the eventualities buried in this condition, eventualities perceived by her with fear through the clairvoyance accompanying the insight into self. The final eventuality is death. It comes after repeated effacements of the reachable and malleable symptoms of life, such as personality, identity, will. The violation is accomplished by her parents and parents-in-law both. Although in opposing camps their actions unite in effect converging towards her annihilation. Apart from these, there are also people in her office, males, who beat down with ease her defences against their advances and ditch her when, fleeing from her fate, she solicits them for support.

Made inert and paralysed of mind by all these people empowered by tradition to have their own hold upon her, she finally submits to the reality of her nobodyhood. Like a devotee approaching his deity which he has reached at last, she moves towards the tin of kerosene that her dowry-demented parents-in-law have placed by her bed. As she pours the oil over her

head and down her body in oblation to the irrepressible truth about herself, the men, the women, the child she never had the chance to nurse because it was a girl, file past her eye in confirmation of the lack of centre in her life, of its driftwood quality. She burns, a composed, trouble-free woman never doubting for an instant that as driftwood she deserved to burn.

In none of the other stories does the hidden reality burst its bounds with such force and wreak havoc. Mostly it is muted. It is flirted with clandestinely, or felt without understanding as in 'The Picnic' and 'Third World'. The treatment is not always forceful. In 'The Responsibility', for instance, the glib, 'talking big' ways of the capital city, which nobody suspected the honest and upright Dharamdas to have in him, burst forth in full fettle after just one visit there. But the *volte-face* is not effective. One can pick out more such stories marked by under-portrayals. But there is no missing the extra vision in the work. It gives the work its energy. It gives it standing and character.

Assertion of the Flow of Life

Wild Peacock and Other Stories
by Kishoricharan Das
Tr. from Oriya by Leelavati and Kamalakanta Mohapatra
Grassroots, Bhubaneswar.
Pp. 114, Rs. 50. 1985.

IN some ways Kishoricharan Das's stories in this collection resemble J.P. Das's in *The Magic Deer*. We feel the same quality of suggestion in them. There seems to be the same tug

and pull of forces below the tableau of events caused by human operations and registered by the senses. The difference, one might say, is that while in J.P. Das the below-the-surface reality asserts itself forcefully, causing subtle environmental changes, its action is more muted in Kishoricharan Das. The impact of the risen reality causes no more than jerks of awareness which are intended by the author to be seen as just incidents in the flow of life. In the story 'The Visitor', for instance, the truth about the visitor is pretty shattering and is central to the story. When it comes home to Suniti, the main foreground character, who has been heaping curses on him silently, one would expect it to be reverberative in some way on the physical plane. But this does not happen. Its effect is totally inward, and does not muffle the major refrain of the author: that the flow of life goes on unchanging and unaffected despite upheavals.

This perennial and ultimate truth comes in for expression in the gesture that Suniti makes when the innocence of the visitor Jagudada is borne in upon her. She bends and touches his feet, taking their dust on her head. This is a timeless gesture, its evocativencess undiminished no matter how devalued it is by modern attitudes. Through this gesture, Suniti is obviously making atonement for the wrong she has been doing the visitor. But at the same time she is also invoking the higher power that rules over and gently anonymises the actions of all people: of bad souls like herself and of good souls like Jagudada.

In the story 'A Scarlet Evening', the intangible reality has been given an impassioned expression. It conveys an immediacy and has a palpability of presence, which, one feels, cannot but burst the bounds of the setting. But it does not do so. The inward simmer and self-dialogue of the protagonist continue and spread a formless, ceaseless patter over the events like primordial rain. The original turbulence of the protagonist's inner wranglings is tamed towards the end. It is made impersonal, and is detached from the will and individuality of the protagonist, to become the unmotivated convulsions of matter. In 'Dispossessed' the agony of the mother at the death of her

child, which seems cannot be mitigated all but vanishes one fine morning, and she becomes again the everyday sensuous woman.

This assertion of the flow of life which is the main feature of Kishoricharan Das's writing is ignored by him sometimes, most unwisely. The title story 'Wild Peacock' is an example. It is a complex story of instincts overcoming custom and routine. The woman thus overcome is Ratnavali. Her story is being narrated to the 'I' of the story by another character, Saroja. As Saroja gives a realistic, graphically enacted account of Ratnavali's transformation, she herself undergoes a like transformation. Her dry, oldmaidhood drops, and she gains a vivacious femininity. In this roused state, vicariously caused but no less real for that, she is physically possessed by the listening 'I'.

The seduction is totally unbelievable. It gives the kind of finality and solid feel to the story which are contrary to the author's mode of perception. There are a couple of other such stories where he has gone astray. 'Waiting for the Bombing' is one such. Here, in addition to an uncharacteristic firmness and solidity, given to the story in the end, there is also lack of clarity. The end is just not clear. We just don't know what's happening. The enemy with which the protagonist grapples seems illusory. But the last sentence . . . 'they watched big red drops of blood cascading down on earth' destroys the illusoriness and brings in a very physical feel which just leaves one baffled. Such mistakes and false turns apart, the intrinsic worth of the stories, however, is not to be denied.

RAJI NARASIMHAN



A Scholarly and Useful Translation

Singing the Glory of Lord Krishna
Śrīkṛṣṇakirtan by Baṛu Caṇḍīdāsa
Tr. with annotations by M.H. Klaiman
Scholars Press, Chico, California.
Pp. xi+331, 1984.

MRS M.H. CLAIMAN has deflnitely done a great service to the literary history of early middle Bengal by translating the *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* of Baḍu Caṇḍīdāsa[1] into English verse form, which, it is expected, would be able to draw attention of the readers and scholars interested in medieval Bengali literature and religious sects and sub-sects of eastern India. She has added a lengthy introduction where the pastoral story of Radha and Krishna has been analysed. A short historical development of Gauḍīya Vaishnavism (i.e., Vaishnavism evolved in Bengal) and annotation of obscure words have also been meticulously arranged by Klaiman.

The *Srīkṛṣṇakīrtan* of Baḍu Caṇḍīdasa is divided in 13 sections (khandas) and 414 songs with a few link-lines composed in Sanskrit. The last section ('Rādhāviraha') is mutilated and hence the date of its composition or copying and other information are not available as its colophon is also lost. Though the book falls in the genre of narrative poetry ('khaṇḍa kāvya'), it is a curious mixture of *jhumur* (pastoral dance-drama) and lyric songs. Some of the modern readers are of the opinion that, in spite of its commendable poetic merit, it could not find favour with the orthodox Bengal Vaishnavas dominated by Śrichaitanya and his followers due to its strong erotic elements and gross vulgarity. Hence a few prudish critics are hostile to the work

1. Baḍu—the translator uses 'Baṛu' in place of 'Baḍu' which is derived from 'Baṭuka' (Skt.), which means, a Brahmin lad or a Brahmin priest of Devala class. Hence, in this review, we retain 'Baḍu' as found in the original MS.

for its overt coarseness and irritating obscenity which is often decried by the Alaṃkāra Śāstrins as *rasābhāsa*, that is, inimical to the aesthetic enjoyment. Be that as it may, *SKK*, the earliest Bengali MS., is certainly amazing for its frank, robust and unsophisticated pastoral character. Baḍu Caṇḍīdāsa has freely borrowed some incidents from *Harivaṃśa*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, *Rādhātantra*, etc., and has incorporated the translations of a few slokas of the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva. But he has been very much influenced by the village society of medieval Bengal with its realistic background. In this connection it may be surmised from the theme and mode of description of *SKK* that the village people of early medieval Bengal did not fight shy of enjoying the mundane story of Radha and Krishna which sometimes verges on indecency and bawdiness.

As *SKK* was rather unknown before its discovery in 1909 (published in 1916) by Vasantaranjan Ray Vidvadballabha of Vangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta, its language seemed curious and unintelligible to a modern reader. And if this reader be a foreigner, his or her difficulty will be twofold. But it is heartening to note that Klaiman has been able to go deeper into the core of the language when translating it into modern English. In the introduction, she has rightly informed us: "Like all translation I have tried for literal accuracy without transgressing naturalness in the target idioms, which in this case is my native American English." Her effort is commendable from another point of view. She has tried to preserve "a rhythmical effect suggestive of the metres of the original."

The translator has taken every precaution to find out the proper meaning of early middle Bengali words which are now almost obsolete. She has translated the whole of *SKK* into simple English verse forms. Her facile pen, coupled with full understanding of old words, has been able to produce a pleasant rendering rather than a verbatim translation. To cite an excerpt from the original and her rendering:

Original : *ka nā bāśī bāe baḍāyī kālini nai kule*
ke nā bāsī bāe baḍāyī e goṭha gokule.

ākul śarīr mor beākul man
bāśīr śabadē mo āulailō rāndhan.
ke nā bāśī bāe baḍāyī se nā kon janā
dāsī hoā tār pāe niśibō āpanā.
. . .
van poḍe āga baḍāyī jagajane jāni,
mor man poḍe yeṇha kumbhārera paṇī

Translation : Near the river Kalindi, who plays the flute, Oh Granny?
In the pasture lands of Gokula, who's playing, Granny,
In my body, I am distressed. In spirit, I feel anxious.
Since I heard the music of the flute, I have spoiled my cooking.
Who's performing on the flute, my Granny? Who's that some one?
I will become his slave and clear[1] his feet upon my person.
. . .
Granny, when a blaze burns down a forest, people know it.
But my heart is like a potter's kiln, it burns discreetly.
I am consumed inside because of longing over Krishna.
—*Śrīkṛṣṇkīrtan*, Vaṁśīkhaṇḍa

This is proof enough of the translator's skill.

Klaiman has discussed at some length the problems of several Caṇḍidāsas which is so baffling to solve. From the Vaishnava sources it is imagined that at least four poets with the same name of Caṇḍīdāsa appeared in medieval Bengali literature during three centuries (15th to 18th). Of them, two wrote narrative story in verse and song (Baḍu Caṇḍīdāsa and Dīnacaṇḍīdāsa) and two composed only songs (the composer Caṇḍīdāsa and Sahajiyā Caṇḍīdāsa). There is very little doubt of the fact that Baḍu Caṇḍīdāsa appeared before Śrichaitanya and, with some reservations, we can also accept that the composer Caṇḍīdāsa whose songs are so much popular even today, must have preceded Śrichaitanyadeva, because according to biographies of Chaitanya (for example, *Śrichaitanya-charitāmrita* of Krishna-

1. *Niśibō* possibly comes from Skt. *ni-kṣip*, i.e., to throw. Hence a proper rendering of the sentence would be 'I would throw myself upon his feet'.

dasa Kaviraj), the Mahāprabhu loved the songs of Caṇḍīdāsa and Vidyāpati, and it is quite possible that the mystic songs of Caṇḍīdāsa were more acceptable to him than the coarse and unvarnished narrative poetry of Baḍu Caṇḍīdāsa.

In *Vaiṣṇava-toṣaṇī* (Commentary of *Bhāgavata*) by Sanatana-goswami, we find the mention of *dānākhaṇḍu* and *naukākhaṇḍa* of Śricaṇḍīdāsa (*kāvya śabdena paramabaichitrī tāsām sūcitāśca gītagovindādi prasiddhasthatā śrīcaṇḍidsādi-darśita dānakhaṇḍa-naukākhaṇḍādi prakārāśca jñeyaḥ*). And these two episodes occur in *SKK* also. Hence it is held by some critics that *SKK* was not unknown to Śrichaitanya and his followers. But owing to the paucity of materials we are not very definite whether Śrichaitanya and his followers were familiar with *SKK*, or whether it was confined to a remote village corner. But there is hardly any doubt that the idea of sensual love as depicted in *SKK* runs counter to the conception of pure love as propagated by Śri chaitanya Mahāprabhu. Hence the reference of two episodes (*dāna* and *naukā*) in the *Vaiṣṇava-toṣaṇī* does not definitely prove Śrichaitanya's familiarity with *SKK*. Moreover, long before the composition of *VT* and *SKK* these two episodes found place in the *Radhāpremāmṛta*, *Rādhātantra*, *Harivaṁśa*, *Gargasamhitā* and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṅa*. Therefore, we may conclude that the mystic songs of Caṇḍīdāsa the composer, and not the crude narrative poetry of Baḍu Caṇḍīdāsa were appreciated by Śrichaitanyadeva.

Singing the Glory of Lord Krishna is a faithful translation of the *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan* of Baḍu Caṇḍīdāsa, but its poetic merit has not been overshadowed by too much literal endeavour. Klaiman is not only a good translator of medieval Bengali text but a very good researcher of Bengali language, literature and culture as is clear from the introduction. Though this translation is meant for foreign readers, it will be very useful to those Indian scholars who want to extract new shades of meaning from this medieval text.

ASIT BANDYOPADHYAY

Seminar on 'Indian Literature in English and English Translation'

Sahitya Akademi had organized a major International Seminar on 'Indian Literature in English and English Translation' at New Delhi, in February 1986. For the benefit of the readers of the *IL*, we present here a report, culled from a leading daily, in order to give an objective view of the event as seen through others' eyes.—*Ed.*

AS AN INTEGRAL PART of a week-long Festival of letters, the Sahitya Akademi organised an international seminar on 'Indian Literature in English and English Translation' from February 25 to 28 at the India International Centre, New Delhi. The Seminar was preceded by the presentation on February 24 of the annual awards to the winners in the 22 languages recognised by the Akademi, and a Writers Meet on February 25 when the award winners spoke of their varied creative experiences; and the seminar was followed on March 1 and 2 by the 'Samvastar lectures' by Mr. S.H. Vatsyayan on 'Perspectives of Memory'. But the seminar was the hard nucleus of the whole Sahityotsava, and made 'Indian Literature' and 'Indian Literature in English'—so amenable to ready ignoration in the megalopolis that is present-day Delhi—nevertheless seem worthy of serious study, comment and debate as though literature really mattered, and the future of India somehow depended on the future health of Indian literature, including literature in English.

The Sahitya Akademi had indeed spread its net wide and far and the participants numbered over 200 from all over the country; and a few from abroad. At the inaugural session, after the Secretary, Prof. Indra Nath Choudhuri's words of welcome, the President, Prof. Gokak in his comprehensive keynote

address, outlined the scope and set the tone of the seminar. He reminded the gathering that, for perhaps the first time, they were considering the future of Indian writing in English, whether creative in its own right or in the form of translation from India's several national languages.

It may be that less than 10 per cent of India's population understand English, yet this is distributed throughout the country. Besides, as Dr. Amrik Singh later pointed out, 50 per cent of the books published in India (and 40 per cent of the world's production) happen to be in English. It should be worthwhile therefore to take stock of the current situation in respect of Indian writing in English and discuss the possible lines of its future development. The seminar was then inaugurated by Mr. Raja Rao, who spoke in gentle tones of silence and speech, and of writing as sadhana, all in tune with the intimations of India's perennial philosophy.

In the first seminar session devoted to poetry, Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah recalled the Indian view of poetry since Vedic times, and showed how the precocious Toru Dutt and later the seer Sri Aurobindo—especially in his great epic *Savitri*—made the hoary tradition relevant and alive once more. Prof. Shantinath Desai glanced at the work of the more recent poets, notably A.K. Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra and Arun Kolatkar.

In his paper on 'Current Shiftings in Aims and Relationships among Indo-English Poets', Prof. John Oliver Perry seemed to perform a sort of breaking a butterfly on a wheel operation using words of learned length like alienation, indigenisation, westernisation, internationalisation, accelerated modernisation, urbanisation, deracination, inauthentic orientalism and extreme communal revivalism, and hinting also at the political dimensions of this new Indian literature in English. One almost felt overwhelmed by this spate of critical *paribhasha*.

On February 26, the session devoted to 'Fiction and Non Fiction Prose' (with Dr. Ramesh Mohan in the chair) began with Dr. Alistair Niven's paper on 'British Perspectives on Indian Literature in Engish'. "We have left our language here," he

said, and added: "you have done new things with it producing writers who use it with freshness and confidence." Dr. Niven referred to the "extra-ordinary nostalgia" for the 'Raj' in Britain today, praised Anand's technically innovative latest novel, *The Bubble*, and the work of Salman Rushdie and Balraj Khanna.

Speculating about the future, Dr. Niven wondered whether should there be the "demise of India's unity, there would still be a role for English here", and also asked why "a voice for the voiceless millions" wasn't heard. And Sri Aurobindo himself "doesn't seem to me, an outsider", he said, "very central any longer." The political 'undertones' behind these remarks elicited a reply from Prof. Gokak, who set the record straight by reading a passage from *Savitri* itself.

Among other participants, Prof. Ediriwira Sarachchandra viewed Indian fiction as "a cross-cultural phenomenon" arising out of the British connection, and cited in particular Arun Joshi's novel, *The Apprentice*. Dr. Meenakshi Mukherjee, in her intriguingly-titled paper 'Text, Pre-Text, and Context', mentioned the possibility of new fiction concealing below its surface "a reincarnation" of an earlier novel, and made complimentary references to the new fiction of Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Rushdie, and spoke of the emerging 'NRI writers' with their "plurality of constituencies" and "decentered consciousness".

Dr. Edwin Thumboo, hailing from Singapore with its "23 languages and dialects belonging to four major language families", considered Kamala Markandaya's *The Golden Honeycomb* as a historical novel covering the century following the abortive 1857-uprising Dr. Thumboo felt that, in a complex linguistic situation as prevails in India (and similar settings with more than one language), creative fiction has its own compulsions, and the right critical criteria should be evolved to assess and advance this literature.

Speaking on non-fiction prose, Prof. Chaman Nahal included in this category 'memorial and 'speculative' prose, as also literary history and criticism; and after a close look at three recent

biographies (Nirad Chaudhuri's *Scholar Extraordinary*, S. Gopal's *Jawaharlal Nehru* and K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's *On the Mother*) concluded that "non-fiction prose needs as much self-discipline, understanding, perception and linguistic control as writing fiction".

As many as four sessions were devoted to the problem of translation from our national languages into one another and into English (and other world languages like French, Spanish, German, Russian, Arabic, Chinese and Japanese) and a dozen papers were presented. Dr. K. Krishnamoorthy and Prof. K.J. Mahale reviewed past efforts to translate from Sanskrit and Prakrit into English and French. While Dr. Krishnamoorthy recalled the work of Sir William Jones, R.C. Dutt, R.T.H. Griffith, N. Raghunathan, R.S. Pandit, C.H. Tawney, A.W. Ryder and D.H. Ingalls, Prof. Mahale referred to the meritorious French renderings by savants like Fauche (who translated the entire *Ramayana* and the works of Kalidasa), Foucau (who shaped into French 11 episodes from the *Mahabharata*), Louis Renou (who rendered Panini), and many others Subramania Bharati, Sri Aurobindo and novelists like Anand, Raja Rao and Premchand have also been made available in French. But although much has been done, much more awaits the sensitive hand of the gifted and dedicated translator.

As for Spanish, it was an inspiration to hear Prof. Susnigdha Dey describe how Zenobia Camprubi and her husband Juan Ramon Jiminez (the future Nobel Laureate) translated Tagore into Spanish, and made him accessible to "the vast Spanish-speaking world of 20 nations", and "it will be very unusual to find a bookshop in Spain and in most Latin American countries where titles from Tagore are not sold".

Presiding over the session on 'Criteria of Acceptability in Indian Literature in Translation', Dr. Mulk Raj Anand said: "The intra-translation of books from one language to another, at least in the major languages, must, we have to agree, be accepted unanimously as a dire necessity, if we want any kind of integration as nationals of this subcontinent". He added that

the Jnanpeeth Foundation and the Sahitya Akademi might sponsor translations of the award winning books in the English language at least.

Translations, yes, we need them; but when it comes to the actual craft of translation, the problem bristles with difficulties. Speaking on 'Translation of Prose', Dr. K.M. George rightly felt that translating 'discursive' prose "is more easily manageable, as the material is more concrete and less elusive" than in 'aesthetic' or creative prose (like serious fiction). His suggestion was that a joint effort at translation by a Malayalam (or any other Indian language) writer and one with expertise in English —the former ensuring fidelity and the latter acceptability of the English rendering—was likely to yield the best results (This was how V.M. Basheer's 'My Grandad had an Elephaht' was Englished by R.E. Asher with the assistance of three Malayalam scholars). Dr. George also pleaded that, in literary exchanges between East and West, there should be more reciprocity than now, and this could be done only by producing an increasing number of translations from the Indian languages into English.

But the problem is far from easy, as Dr. G.S. Amur, Dr. Ayyappa Panikar and Dr. Krishna Baldev Vaid explained in their different ways in respect of Kannada novels, Malayalam dramas and Hindi poetry and fiction respectively. The point of Dr. Vaid's 'parable' was that we shouldn't pathetically look for translators from abroad (U.K., U.S.), but go ahead and do the job ourselves. It is doubtless both a challenging and an exceedingly difficult job to produce 'self-contained, faithful, yet readable' translations, yet one must persevere, for (as Panikar put it): "Translation is always a difficult job, that is precisely why we should keep it going."

It is also true that there can be no finality about translations of imaginative writing, and as Dr. Sisir Kumar Das remarked in his paper, "all new translations are in some way criticisms of the earlier translations." And while it is true that translating poetry—especially lyrical poetry—is the most daunting task of all, asking for the transplantation of the poem's

'tonal modality', 'rhythmic pattern', 'thematic thrust' and 'unique cluster of images' (Dr. Shiv K. Kumar's phrases) from one language into another, the near miracle sometimes does happen, and once in a way the rendering may be so good as to merit the comment: "the original is unfaithful to the translation"! Which means that translators shouldn't too hastily lose heart and down their tools in despair.

A 'Bibliography of Indian Literature in English Translation' (1984), edited by J.M. Mohanty, lists 1,200 items, but this is far from impressive for a subcontinental literature that speaks in 20 seasoned voices. We need many more, and much better translations. But the task is baffling, and is made more so by the theorists of the art or craft of translation. Prof. Bidhubhushan Das's paper (which was distributed, though he was himself absent) spoke of the seven (i.e. phonemic, literal, metrical, prose, rhymed, blank verse and interpretative) 'strategies' of translating poetry, and of the need to fill the gap between literary history, linguistics, stylistics, semantics and aesthetics by a comprehensive "poetics of translation".

Besides, how can you translate poetry when its sense is so elusive, and each reading may yield a slightly different spiral of meaning? And Prof. Pramod Talgeri, in his jargon-laden paper, described 'literary' translation as "a medium which opens a new way of expressing 'alienness', the relationship of heterogeneity, the transcendence of self and the manifestation of the 'other'."

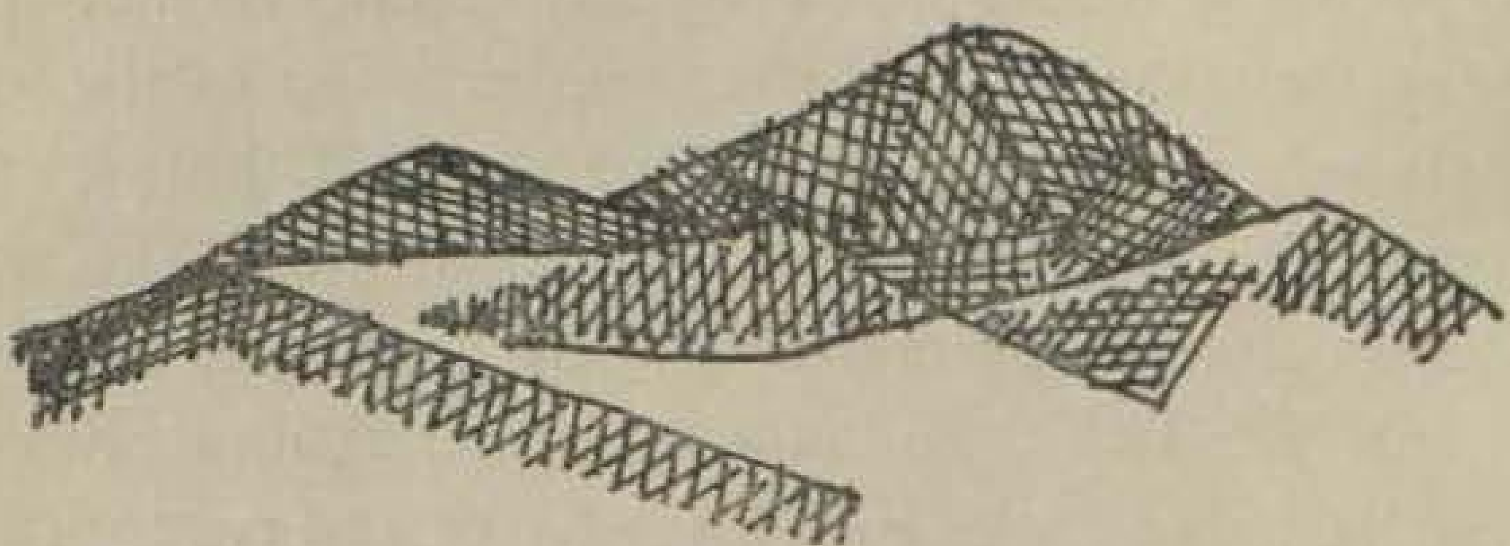
The seminar-sittings accounted for about 20 hours, and many of the papers provoked lively—at times heated—discussions in which writers and scholars freely took part and helped a consensus to emerge. The attendance averaged around 200, and the younger participants spoke with knowledge and commitment and a commendable gusto. There was a fair sprinkling of the fair sex, which lent colour and light to the proceedings. Although a few, including Dr. Amrik Singh, felt that English in India should be "the medium of scholarship" and not "the medium of creative expression", the general sense seemed to be that Indian literature in English was a literature that had definitely arrived, and

had a bright future of its own and also as a link literature in our polylingual predicament.

And this literature is Indian, very Indian, with its roots in the soil and soul of India, and not just a variation or devaluation of English Literature, or a part of Commonwealth or Third World literature, or yet one more example of the growing world literature in English. Indubitably Indian, a poem like Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* bridges the whole arc from Veda, Upanishad and Itihasa to the psychology, science and technology of the present day. As for Indian literature in English translation, it has to be done on an extensive and viable scale so that it may help to forge the integration of 'pluralistic' India into a nation with a heart, mind and soul.

In the concluding session 11 poets—Umashankar Joshi, V.K. Gokak, Shiv K. Kumar, Nissim Ezekiel, S. Mokashi-Punekar, Keki N. Daruwalla, Ayyappa Panikar, Sankha Ghosh, Hemant Kulkarni, Edwin Thumboo and S. Balu Rao—read from their poetry, and Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar (who presided) gave the valedictory address.

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Our Contributors

Authors:

MITRA, ARUN (*b.* 1909)

Has published eight collections of poems, *Pratham Pali Shesh Pathar*, 81 being the latest. Has received Ultorath and Rabindra Awards for Poetry. Lives in Calcutta.

UKHOPADHYAY, SUBHAS (*b.* 1919)

Has over 50 publications. His *Jato Durei Jai* received S.A. Award, 64. Lives in Calcutta.

HAKRAVARTI, NIRENDRANATH (*b.* 1924)

His *Ulango Raja* received S.A. Award, 74. Also recipient of Ultorath Poetry Award, Tarashankar and Ananda Literary Awards, etc. Select poems translated into English as *Naked King and Other Poems*. Presently edits *Anandamela*, juv. monthly, Calcutta.

SGUPTA, ALOKERANJAN (*b.* 1933)

Has published 10 collections, *Ebar Chalo Bipratipe* being the latest. Has edited and translated a volume of Bengali poems in German. Received the Goethe Medal, 85. Is now Visiting Professor at Heidelberg University.

GOPADHYAY, SUNIL (*b.* 1934)

Has published 11 collections of poems. Has received nanda and Bankim Awards. His *Sei Samai* received .. Award, 85. Is now Associate Editor, *Desh* weekly, cutta.

SINHA, KABITA (SMT.) (*b.* 1931)

Has about ten publications. Is with the All India Radio, Calcutta.

DASGUPTA, PUSHKAR (*b.* 1941)

Has published two collections of poems, and edited and translated an anthology of French poetry in Bengali. Teaches French at Alliance Francaise, Calcutta.

BANDYOPADHYAYA, SAJAL (*b.* 1942)

Has published six collections of poems, *Vraman*, 86 being the latest. Edited two poetry journals, *Shruti* and *Natun Kabita* in the sixties. Teaches Bengali at St. Xavier's College, Calcutta.

RADICE, WILLIAM (*b.* 1951)

British poet, with two books of poems. His translations from Tagore, *Selected Poems*, has been published in Penguin Modern Classics, 1985. Teaches Bengali in the Faculty of Oriental Studies, London University.

GHOSE, SISIRKUMAR (*b.* 1919)

Eminent thinker and critic. Has widely written on Tagore, his latest a monograph is being published by the Sahitya Akademi in May 86. Has also edited a selection of Tagore's works, *Tagore for You.* Lives in Santiniketan.

JHA, ASHOK KUMAR (*b.* 1943)

Scholar, presently Fellow, Indian Institute of Advance Studies, Simla.

WAJAHAT, ASGHAR (*b.* 1946)

Hindi short story writer. Has also made a film on Ghaza recently. Teaches Hindi at Jamia College, Delhi.

PANIGRAHI, BHAGABATI CHARAN

Was the pioneer of the Progressive Writers Movement in Oriya, died prematurely.

POOMANI (*b.* 1947)

Pseudonym of the Tamil novelist and short story writer, P. Manikkavasagam. His novel *Piragu* received Illakkiya

Chintanai Award. Works in the Directorate of Cooperative Societies, Madras.

RAZAK, SALAAM BIN (*b.* 1941)

Urdu short story writer. His only collection, *Nangi Dopahar ka Sipahi*, 77 received Urdu Academy Awards of U.P. and of Maharashtra. Teaches in a school at Bombay.

BHATTACHARYYA, B.K. (*b.* 1924)

Assamese novelist, his *Iyaruingam* received S.A. Award, 61 and *Mrityunjaya* the Jnanpith Award, 79. Is Vice-President, Sahitya Akademi. Lives in Gauhati.

SARMA, SATYENDRANATH (*b.* 1917)

Assamese scholar. Has written widely on Assamese literature in English. Was Rabindranath Tagore Professor in Modern Indian Languages, Gauhati University. Now retired, lives in Gauhati.

IYENGAR, K.R. SRINIVASA (*b.* 1908)

Scholar, and author of several works including *Indian Writing in English.* Formerly Prof. of English and Vice-Chancellor, Andhra University; also Visiting Prof. at Leeds University and Vice-President, Sahitya Akademi, 1969-78. Lives in Madras.

RAJI NARASIMHAN (SMT.) (*b.* 1930)

Indo-English novelist and short story writer. Her latest novel is *Drifting to a Dawn*, 83. Lives in New Delhi.

BANDYOPADHYAY, ASIT (*b.* 1924)

Bengali scholar, has written several works on Bengali literature, including a history of it in two parts. Presently Prof. of Language and Literature, Asiatic Society, Calcutta.

Translators:

DUTTA, SWAPNA (SMT.) (*b.* 1942)

Has published books for children in English. Is working on translations from Bengali poetry under a fellowship of the Ministry of Culture. Lives in New Delhi.

JHA, RATNADHAR (*b.* 1943)
Journalist, is now with the UNI, Delhi.

DAS, ASHOK KUMAR
Translates from Oriya and Bengali. Lives in Balasore, Orissa.

RAMASWAMI, M.S. (*b.* 1916)
Translates poetry and fiction from Tamil. Formerly in Judicial Service. Lives in Trivandrum.

JAI RATAN (*b.* 1917)
Veteran translator, has published several translations from Hindi and Urdu which include works of Prem Chand, Mohan Rakesh and Krishan Chander. Lives in New Delhi.

Artists:

NAIDU, R.S. (*b.* 1985)
Was an eminent Graphic artist and, in the forties, actively connected with the Congress Socialist Party. Mostly lived in Karnataka.

SHARMA, VIPIN (*b.* 1960)
Freelance Theatre-and-Graphic artist. Lives in New Delhi.